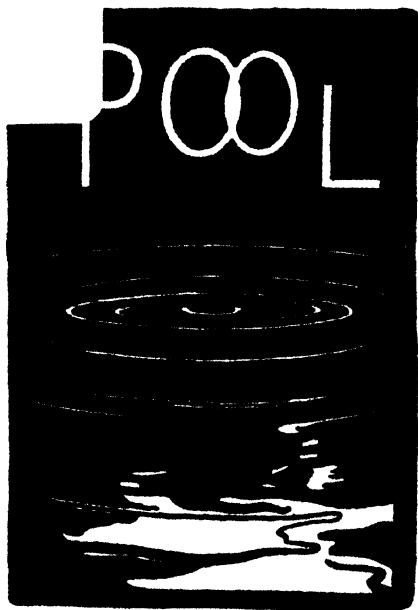


# FILM PROBLEMS OF SOVIET RUSSIA

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T E R R I T E T  
SWITZERLAND



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## FOREWORD

We have endeavored to make the information in the following pages as accurate as possible. Unless otherwise stated, I have seen myself all the films described. Whenever possible I have collected biographical data from the directors themselves. Where I have not been able to do this, I have got the information direct from Moscow.

I should like to thank the Russische Handelsvertretung in Berlin, Derussa and Prometheus for having shown me so many of the films mentioned, often in an uncut version with the original Russian sub-titles; Miss W. Ray for having undertaken the translation of many Russian letters and documents, and the many Russians in Moscow and Berlin who have furnished me with data and photographs. My thanks are particularly due to P. Attasheva and the *Sovietsky Ekran* for verifying and sending through dates and also details of forthcoming productions.

BRYHER.

*Switzerland, 1922.*



## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTION.

Up to last summer I had seen only four Russian films, three in Switzerland and one in Germany. But we took the aeroplane service to Berlin last July, having been promised that we could see there the output of a whole season.

I like flying. I do not want to fly an aeroplane myself; what I like is to get the landscape in perspective. Whoever started the idea that it was impossible to appreciate the view from an altitude? It is the only way really to see a country, to see it from a plane. Fields and tiny hills and woods mass themselves together like a crowd Eisenstein is directing; their place in a whole becomes apparent, all their characteristics and problems, instead of a tiny piece of them, become revealed. One can see why the road turned exactly at that point and why there is a bend in the stream. Even the colors in a landscape become new and the earth is flat as a screen upon which shadow and wind and the aeroplane itself project pictures.

• However, as we neared a lake that day the engine began to make peculiar noises; all the sounds, in fact, that should not happen in a plane. And an official of sorts turned round, his face white and red in spots, and grunted in German, "We are about to crash."

(I think he actually said we might be going to crash, but between my limited knowledge of the language and the terrific noise of the engine, I understood the first meaning.)

I looked out—on a bank of trees. Immediately the shot of the aeroplane crashing in a swift slant through branches in René Clair's *Prey of the Wind* came into my mind. (It is curious what a difference direction makes to a picture. Those few shots in

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(Clair's poorest film gave me more sense of flight than *the elaborate photography of Wings*.) We plunged, it seemed to me by this time, erratically, over tree top and stumps of branches, and all I could do was to sit still and see alternately our own position and René Clair's picture.

I had always thought that one advantage of air travel was that if anything happened, it would happen quickly. It is foolish to form pre-conceived notions, for there we sat, for *twenty minutes*, while the aeroplane jerked its way back with unpleasing ominous noises to the aerodrome, with oil heated to over a hundred degrees and the constant risk of fire. And as we got out on to firm ground officials said sorrowfully and angrily, "You do not appear to realise you were in great danger."

And I have never ceased wondering what we were expected to do. Scream? But against the noise of the engine we should have remained unheard. Faint? Surely unwise with a prospect of crashing. Have hysterics? Again the engine. It is a problem impossible of solution.

And yet the incident reflects the problem of this book. For the stock phrase of Fleet Street is "the enjoyment of Russian films is a species of hysteria." Yet the aerodrome officials were pained by our absence of hysteria: they scolded us for it, in fact, as if we had been naughty children. On the other hand, our German friends were politely amused that we mentioned it: "Oh, that is nothing to the time I was forced down in a gale into a swamp." Or casually: "Of course, it is irritating to lose an hour on your time of arrival." So, on the one hand we were blamed for not making a fuss, and on the other laughed at for mentioning the affair at all. And the actual circumstance was that it was a most unpleasant twenty minutes, but there was absolutely nothing you could do about it. And this is precisely what happens when it comes to questions connected with Russia in England. Because it is not possible, apparently, to discuss Russian films as art; all sorts of extraneous questions have to be dismissed first. How can you see anything in those dreadful Russians, somebody queries, and then another person sniffs, but your opinions are quite retrogressive from a revolutionary point of view. And someone else



*Potemkin* The Odessa people, at the moment the massacre is about waving protection to the sailors on board the *Potemkin*



Detail from the above



Leinstakoff as the father in *Mother*.



Nicolai Barldof in *Mother*, one of Pudovkin's earliest films, and a classic of the Russian cinema.

## INTRODUCTION

cries "No compromise," and again, another, "But they have criticised the Army" (quite forgetting the usual English criticism of the Red Guard). Until finally one wonders where, in all this riot of "talkies," Russian film art belongs.

Either, it appears, you must be prepared to bayonet your aunt because she won't read Karl Marx, or else you must leave the room because *Potemkin* is mentioned. Either you must say that England can do no wrong or else scream "Down with England." When mercifully throughout English history every self-respecting Englishman criticised the country hard and got so annoyed with it that he often left it, which put us in the position we now enjoy instead of our remaining a race of quarrelling savages.

Art has little to do with politics, but a great deal to do with truth. Whenever I read in *The Times Educational Supplement* that there are one hundred and sixty thousand children studying in condemned buildings, I become as revolutionary as anybody. Whenever I read a Communist leaflet urging dismissal from consideration of every idea unconnected with its immediate policy, I become equally irritated. Russia has made a brave and an interesting experiment: it is difficult to think of any compromise being possible in a land that had been so oppressed and so neglected. More than half the population were left before the war a prey to disease and famine, without education and without medical aid. The situation in England is utterly different. We need, it is true, a psychological revolution, and that will come. But we are unprepared for it as yet and it will take us a generation, perhaps fifty years, to accomplish. And it will begin, I think, in England, rather in the middle classes. In the long course of evolution Russia and England probably will meet, but England will go by a quite different path and it will develop in a quite other manner.

The present attitude to Russian films in England is dangerous on account of the inconceivable stupidity of the authorities. They are investing a work of art with the terror and power which the forest negro credits to a fetish. Say *Potemkin* and it appears that the whole British Army will go down one after another like ninepins. (Mr. Meisel, for instance, was refused a visa for some time because he happened to have composed music for this film. Pudovkin

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lands on a week's permit, guarded and muzzled, and they quite forget he fought with the Allies through the war, and should therefore have been received with appropriate honor.) Germany has had a revolution, too, and Austria has suffered as bitter starvation as ever happened in Russia and they have seen Russian films for the last three years and nothing dire has happened. I, as a free-born English citizen, insist on my right to see what I like, read what I like, and say what I like. And where is our boasted English liberty if I am to be searched at the customs for books which half the authors of England have certified have literary value, and denied the chance of studying the greatest films of the world because they happen to portray a revolution that every self-respecting Englishman was glad had happened? I object to being considered less able to consider problems for myself than a Frenchman, or a German or a Swiss. And what I want to know of any English Government is not whether it believes in capitalism or communism, but what it is going to do about the education problem (both in England, India and Africa), what constructive steps it is taking to reduce unemployment and, most important of all, what it is going to do about the censorship.

But, say the critics, Russian films are not art, they are hysteria partially induced by mass-feeling and hysterical music.

I saw a dozen of these films last summer in small projection rooms without music at nine in the morning, and they were art—as the Elizabethans were art—and they were truth. The full descriptions of the films follow in these pages. But every time I saw one I was ashamed because it was only a handful of us seeing it, and I knew what it would mean to scores of English people I know, to see their thoughts, and their problems, set down in these films. And having seen *Ten Days*, *The Peasant Women of Riazan*, *His Son*, *The End of St. Petersburg* and *Potemkin* in the space of five days, I felt that first I wanted to know everything about modern Russia I could and then that I must certainly try and make a map of what I saw and learnt so that it was open to those English interested to know what had been done, what could be seen abroad, what to look for if they went to Germany, and the chief names of directors, films, cameramen and actors. I realise,



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now, properly to write the book I ought to go to Moscow. Perhaps one day I shall be able to go there.

But information was not easily obtained. Authority having set up a fetish, English revolutionaries set up a fetish too. A, it appears, was a revolutionary in 1908 and may know something or other that took place in Russia, but he is guarded by B. Before one can get access to B one must be examined by C as to one's English political opinions. As these do not appear to be very concise one is referred to D, and while there hears from E that A has not got the information desired. One therefore leaves in an aura of suspicion from both parties. After a few of these endeavours it seemed, and was, much simpler to apply direct to headquarters in Moscow or to their officials abroad, who gave simply, directly and courteously all the data I wanted.

I have tried to give in the following pages essential information plainly and objectively. I hope to follow this volume with a larger one (if they will let me go to Moscow some summer), which will really contain the history in full of the Russian cinema.

I shall not attempt to give in detail any long account of the early history of the Russian cinema, although I have a list of over fifty films. But as I have seen none of them, and as they are not now likely to be exported, except for some exhibition of cinema history, it has seemed better to concentrate upon the films of recent years.

The Nationalisation of the Cinema was decreed in 1919. At that time only a few kinos were open, chiefly in Leningrad and other large cities, and the production side was almost at a standstill. Most of the equipment of the studios had been destroyed, and it is even said that one or two of the first films made, after the Revolution, were photographed with four or five Jupiter lamps only; barely the equipment that is considered necessary by an amateur photographer. The first films exported were taken by Germany, and gradually a few foreign films found their way into Russia. More equipment was purchased, more and more films were made, travelling cinemas were instituted, and the various organisations, such as the Meschrabpom-Russ and the Gosvoyoekino, developed their activities. It was the success abroad of

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*Potemkin*, in 1924, that turned the mind of Europe towards the cinematographic development of Russia.

Three films of that transition period have been shown, I think, in England; *The Postmaster*, directed by Jeliabushky, after Pushkin's story, from a scenario by Ozep, with Moskvín, Tamarin and Malinovskaya in the chief parts; *The Marriage of the Bear*, directed by K. Eggert; and *Morosko*, which was also directed by Jeliabushky, a fairy-tale, and made in Russia for children. While these are all interesting as showing the beginnings of modern development, and as examples of what can be made under immense difficulties, they are not of the standard of many of the more recent pictures. They should be seen, however, if possible, by those interested in the development of the Russian cinema.

The chief cinema organisations in Russia at present are the Sovkino, Meschrabpom-Russ, Wufku, and the Gosvoyenkino. There are also the Goskinprom in Georgia, with headquarters at Tiflis, the Belgoskino in White Russia, the Armenkino in Armenia, the Uzbekgoskino in Uzbekistan, and the Tchuvashkino in the Autonomous Tchuvash Republic.

The Sovkino has three studios in Moscow and one in Leningrad and turns out annually about 55 pictures, together with a number of culture and topical films. It employs about twenty-two producing groups. Meschrabpom-Russ employs ten groups, turns out about 15 pictures a year, and has its studio in Moscow. The Gosvoyenkino was established to provide films for the education of the Red Army and the Navy. It has made about fifty films in the past eighteen months and has also headquarters in Moscow.

The methods of making a film in Russia are quite different from those in any other country. The composition of the film is the important matter, and the chief consideration is the effect, and not the actors. Cutting, again, is considered far more important than the story. (As there seems to exist a little confusion in some minds as to what cutting actually is, the following explanation may be useful. A length of usually four hundred feet is loaded into the camera at a time. When taken and the film developed it will contain several different scenes. For instance, A may enter a room, walk to the window, lean out and call to B standing in the

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street. This may be "cut" in different ways. It may be taken <sup>ply</sup> as described, but it will probably be found that A took a little too long over his walk and then a few feet of A will be cut from the negative. Or A may be shown, from four or five different angles or when he looks out of the window, several shots may be inserted to give the effect either of what he sees or what his mood is, of the moment. More concisely, each picture is a word. Jumble them together anyhow and you get a child's first composition. Fit them together at varying speeds and you get poetry. Usually the Russians go in for very swift cutting, as when Eisenstein, in *Ten Days*, gives the effect of the crowd by quick flashes of different faces from different angles. Some of the Germans and Swedes, on the other hand, are noted for their slowness, as they may allow a hundred feet or more of film merely to the opening of a door.)

The actors in Russia are a secondary consideration and when possible, for at any rate the crowd scenes, actual workers are taken who have not been photographed before. Whole factories volunteer or squadrons of the Red Army. The final decision and complete control is given to the director.

But how does one become a director or cameraman, or even actor in Russia?

✓ Chiefly through the State School of Cinematography at Moscow. This was founded in 1919, to train directors, actors, cameramen, lighting experts and assistants. By a special Government decree all the studios are obliged to give a certain number of places yearly to graduates from the school. Pupils are also sent to work in the studios during the summer and are often used where crowds, etc., are required. The course is three years for a director and two for an actor. Industrial qualification (actual work in studios) is also required after leaving. They are obliged to study the technique of cinematography in detail, psychology, the history of art, costume, dramatic literature, anatomy, make up, rhythmic, acrobatics, acting, sociology and the science of photography. After the first three months, one Russian told me, those unlikely to prove suitable are weeded out. It is a very difficult course to complete. There is also the Leningrad Photo Cinema School, where cameramen, lighting experts and men for the printing and

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developing laboratories are trained. The Ukraine has now a school of cinematography similar to the one in Moscow, and there are courses for the training of actors in Leningrad. It is expected that other schools in different parts of the country will be founded in time on the same lines. Once through the school, however, they are not afraid of youth, but a young director, after some actual experience in the industry, will soon get a chance to make a film.

All films when finished are submitted to about twenty people to ensure that they are sound from a Communist view point. This does not mean that the films must be political in character, but they must not contain diametrically opposed ideas. The film is then submitted to an audience of workers, and if they do not care for it, it is sent back for alterations. Actually I was told in Berlin, by Russian directors, that they prefer working in Russia to working abroad, as abroad it was necessary to supervise all details personally, whereas in Russia everyone worked together and their minds were free merely to direct. I question myself, however, whether the multitude of criticism will be good for cinematography; not now, but in five years time, as insensibly a tradition will develop which will mean that films may be rejected because they present a new point of view. But perhaps the situation will be adjusted.

Every effort is made to interest the workers in the cinema and to make them feel it is a part of their life. It seems a pity that travelling cinemas could not be provided for some of the villages in England and that English film companies should not rely rather on unspoilt native material than on taking extras always that have probably migrated from the theatre.

There are many cinema magazines published in Russia; many of these are illustrated. There are also numbers of books issued on the cinema and its problems. There is a Museum, and a Cinema Cabinet was founded in Moscow to study the theoretical aspects of the subject, the question of teaching, etc., and to report on the best foreign films. A great number of reports have been issued.

The studios suffered from lack of equipment for some time; occasionally the resources of several had to be borrowed to enable them to photograph a big scene, but matters are now improving

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Debric, Cameréclair and Pathé are the chief cameras in use, with Agfa and Eastman stock.

- The main difference between the Russian and the foreign film is not one of politics but psychology ; American, English, and most foreign films are not allowed to be founded upon psychology, but must conform to a standard of " conventional morals " issued in printed form by the censorship departments and which are happily rare in real life.

## CHAPTER II.

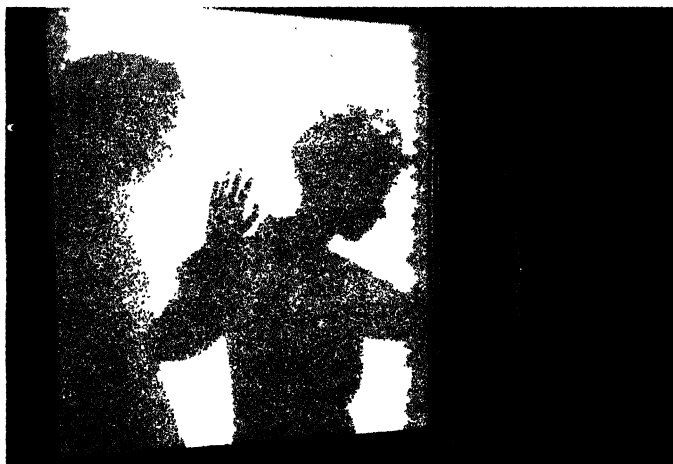
### KULESHOF.

Russia was swept by revolution. And it is well before beginning any consideration of the Russian cinema to consider what that was. For it is never, as people seem to imagine, a sudden thing, the hasty flaring temper of a destructive child, smashing plate and vase and chair into fragments for sheer joy of smashing. No rebellion arises squall-like, suddenly, but is the outcome of perhaps centuries of growth (whether active, as was the French or the peasants under Tyler, or passive, as the Puritans and Quakers); it is the answer to petty tyranny and bitter oppression of thousands of families during several generations. Grandfathers who have rebelled in small ways may have been silenced for their generation, but the psychic effect of their punishment stamped on the minds of the next generation and the next, moves finally a great mass forward into refusal of this or that particular type of injustice.

For a hundred years unrest had stirred in Russia. Illiteracy, oppression and want ground against a rigid caste system offering little of value or outlet to those favored by it. It was said, for instance, that there was one doctor to about every five thousand eight hundred people, as against one to every four hundred in England. And that, as most of these lived in cities, there was only one doctor, roughly, to meet the needs of twenty thousand peasants. Education was provided for only a small minority. There was little chance for the intelligent person to employ his gifts usefully, for if he were a peasant a thousand feudal restrictions hemmed him in, and if belonging to more favored classes his views were usually regarded with disfavor by the authorities. So Russia sprawled, an illiterate weight between the East and



L. Kuleshof, a pioneer of the new School of Russian cinema



From *Your Acquaintance*, by L. Kuleshof. A. Chocklova (who played Edith in *Expiation*) and Ferdinandof.



*Expiation*, Kuleshov's gum masterpi method. After the murders, Edith pre the

forerunner of the present "Russian" ts her maddened husband from destroying



Edith (A. Chocklova) reviles the murderer (A. Fogel)



## KULESHOF

Modern Europe, having the advantages of neither and the disadvantages of both.

The revolutionary attempts of 1905 failed. Unrest and repression grew together. Upon the outbreak of strife in 1914 it was freely said, "War will save Russia from a revolution."

From 1914 to 1917—war.

Think back and remember 1917 in England. Food queues stretching in the rain. Air-raids. Influenza. Provisions growing less, people growing weaker, people losing hope, and the constant attrition of the population from wounds, disease, submarine sinkings and aerial warfare. How many men and women in 1917, in England, where conditions were more tolerable than in some of the war-ravaged countries, did not feel that death was preferable to waiting without hope?

The Russians went through this, together with no properly organised system of medical attention or leave for the soldiers, and with poverty and starvation increasing for the women and children in the villages and towns.

Think again. Many men drafted into the English army could not stand the horrors and uniformity of life in the trenches. They were passed out as shell-shocked or actually insane. It is said that definite attempts were made to keep their numbers unknown because of the effect on the nation, and that the casualties from mental strain were greater than those caused by many dangerous diseases. But a man drafted into the English army could write to his family and receive letters, he had reasonable expectation of occasional leave, and knew that if he were ill or wounded some sort of medical attention would be forthcoming. He knew, also, that his wife would receive a small allowance.

But the Russian soldier was taken from his village or town and neither he nor his wife knew if they would see each other again. He could seldom read or write. Quite often he did not know why he was fighting. He knew that, with notable exception, if he were ill or wounded the chance of proper medical attention was remote. (Even in the English newspapers there were occasional hints of the horrors of the situation.) Then many Englishmen

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had a definite aim in fighting at the beginning. They believed they were saving their own possessions, because they knew that if England were defeated, the factories where they worked, the small shops they owned, the fishing smacks they sailed, would be destroyed also. But the Russian was suffering incredible hardships for the sake of a regime which oppressed and ignored him; he knew he would return not to re-building a home or a business, but to more hardships and to forging tighter his already intolerable chains.

In 1917 starvation accomplished what ideals had failed to achieve. If lives were to be lost anyway, they might as well be lost for definite hope of betterment, and not for the pleasure of those in power, whose actions had led to war and its consequences. The story of what happened can be seen in *Ten Days That Shook the World*.

But even revolution cannot completely alter the daily necessities of life. There are habits (conditional reflexes, perhaps) that cannot easily be surrendered without a sensation of loss, even if bullets are flying about the street. People look for breakfast on waking or buy a newspaper in the evening, in spite of barricades. So war and after-effects of war and revolution and daily habits of life, re-adjustment to civilian conditions, finding food, making newspapers, tangled together in the rebuilding of a nation. Big ideas were suddenly halted by apparently unimportant details.

The first problem in post-revolution Russia was education.

The second was for something to take the minds of people from themselves and the turmoils about them and to provide a bridge from the destruction of war to the construction of peace.

Only one thing existed capable of being used as a solution to these problems, by reason of its cheapness when applied to vast masses, and because of its direct appeal; this was the cinema.

Films had been made in Russia haphazardly since 1908, entirely by private individuals upon sheerly commercial principles. Before 1914 a certain number of foreign films entered the country, but during the war, supplies being cut off, almost all foreign films had disappeared from the screen.

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In December, 1917, a special Cinema Commission was organised at Leningrad at the People's Commissariat of Education. By 1919 the industry was nationalised and placed under the control of the State.

Sometime during these years, while Russia was swept by revolution and counter revolution, war-adjustment, famine and necessity, a Russian named Kuleshof founded a school of cinematography.

Lev Vladimirovitch Kuleshof was born in 1899 and began to work at cinematography in 1916 with Khanzhonkof, as assistant manager and artist, under the director of Bauer. After the death of the latter he worked independently as a manager. His first experience in the construction of American staging was the picture, *The Scheme of the Engineer, Prait*. In 1917 he joined the firm of Kozlovsky-Yourief. Then in 1918 he worked at the photography of chronicles at the Gos-Kino. In the photography of these chronicles American scenic methods were employed for the first time. From 1921 he worked in G.I.K. as teacher and as member of the management. In 1920 he formed a company, with which he has been working down to the present time.

From one point of view their problem was easy. There were no renters to insist that " a dancing " must be included in the picture, nor censors to forbid the showing, say, of a film like *Joyless Street*, because it was preferable not to let the masses see a story of starving Vienna.

Kuleshof is said to be one of the pioneers of Russian cinematography. Only one of his films (an excellent example of the modern method) has been shown to date outside of Russia. This is *Sühne*, which has been shown throughout Germany and Switzerland; the English title is *Expiation*, and in France it was called *Dura Lex*. It is made from a story by Jack London.

This film is rough and wild and brooding as the tempest it portrays; the northern night on the fringes of civilization. It is a rough sketch combining many features that were to emerge so strongly in the second period of Russian cinematography; the period to which belong *Mother* and *Potemkin*. It hints the

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lyricism of Pudovkin, when blossoms break about the floating hut in spring. Its psychology links on to later method. Murder is done and justice made into a name for the sake of gold and a stagnant system of morals. The piling up of horror over months was later to be condensed into the sharp inevitability of *Two Days*. The making of nature the centre and the figures subsidiary, recalls the *Forty First*.

The story itself is simple. Man and wife, two other men, and their servant Jack, have dug summer long for gold. Winter in the wilds is upon them. Jack, the servant (played by V. Fogel), discovers the gold, but is not entitled to share in it. As the monotonous days pass waiting for the spring, they amuse themselves describing what they will do with the riches and now and then mocking Jack, who will have nothing to show on his return. Someone jeers once too often. Jack snatches up his gun, there are shots, fighting. Two are dead on the floor, upset food spills across a table. It is tragedy, this. And the servant, the murderer, lies bound, with husband and wife staring down at him.

In the storm, sliding over ice, through driving snow, they struggle with two bodies strapped to sledges. Frozen. They hack a hole in the ice. The prisoner, strapped too tightly to save himself, slides down the plank out of the hut. Rain beats on him. Rain that is like knives. The woman drags him back into the hut. Day in, day out, they keep watch. First one sleeps while the other holds the gun. Shoot, begs the prisoner in the corner, but that would not be justice. They are all gradually going mad. And spring comes.

It is the wife, Edith's birthday. She looses the man, they sit at table together. And now there is no going back to a gun and bondage. But justice must be satisfied. Under a picture of Queen Victoria (with folded hands) they judge him guilty of murder.

This scene has the quality of the trial in *Mother*. Justice meaning so little and so much. The hard and fast measuring rod taking account neither of essential truth nor psychological difference. Except that where sympathy can fall but on one side



After the burial of the victims The return to the cabin From *Expiation*.



After the return Earth, worn out, collapses while her husband (S. Komorot) makes last the prisoner's ropes



*Expiation* Floods adding to the grimness of a situation that has sapped its victims' strength and sanity.



When the floods have subsided *Expiation* The last gruesome bid for sanity, as Edith walks in front of the soaked earth holding aloft her prayer-book.

## KULESHOF

in *Mother*, here it falls both sides. With Edith's madness growing and with her sympathy so anxious to be convinced this justice is not the right one, but unable to dare enough to discount the law she has learned.

In the beginning again of storm Jack is hung to a tree. 'Peace does not come to Edith's heart, though act has been meted with act, violence with violence. She huddles against the wall of the hut with her husband. The wind blows, the door opens. Jack stands at the door. The branch had broken. He takes up some gold from the table and flings the rope at them, for "the rope of a hanged man is said to bring luck." And it ends as it began, with ferocious darting rain and storm and wind.

*Sühne* is great and imperfect and chaotic. It is not a pleasant film to watch because, as in all Russian films, one is caught up into it as if one were actually there, watching these events, having to decide one's self if this is justice or that cruelty. But to appreciate the greatness of the film compare it to any Hollywood gold rush super epic. With *The Trail of '98*, for instance, which is reputed to have cost so many hundred thousand dollars, with its stars, and its hundreds of extras and its perfect equipment of laboratories and cameras. Never for one instant did *The Trail of '98* give an impression of hardship. Of heroism. Of the awful fight that is the north—with nature.

For there is terror in snow, that blots out trails. There is insanity in monotony of cold. The wind can choke—far enough to the north—as easily as gas can, or water.

And there is with the terror beauty.

And *Sühne* had both these things. Psychological horror, horror of almost supernatural intensity. The sensation of monotony. And the will to live in defiance of encouragement to die. And for beauty the first blossoms, the hut floating on sun-broken ice water, and the extraordinary loveliness of the woman who was Edith, A. Chocklova.

People have said she is ugly. Even it is said that this is the reason that she acts no more in films. But how can the superficial prettiness of an average Hollywood heroine be preferred to this

## FILM PROBLEMS OF SOVIET RUSSIA

creature that has madness and greatness in her face and movements, the quality of snow and the grace of elk scenting storm suddenly among bare branches? Whose hands move as very far north, Iceland poppies (that have no colour) move against wind. It must have been the first time, considering the date, that mind was shown on the screen, instead of merely body.

*Sühne* was shown throughout Germany about a couple of years ago by the Deutsch-Nordische Film Union. It was then released in Switzerland and was shown in the more specialised cinemas in France. It has never been shown in England. It is a Sovkino production, and was photographed by Kusnetzov.

There is no propaganda in it except truth, and there is no reason why it should not be shown freely throughout England. A full appreciation of *Sühne* by H. D. appeared in *Close Up* for May, 1928.

Kuleshof is a pioneer of cinematographic development. He has directed *On the Red Front*, *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Country of the Bolsheviki* (this is said to be an extremely amusing comedy of the adventures of an American who arrives in Russia believing all the tales commonly published about it in the popular press and who falls into the hands of some adherents of the old regime, who, in order to exploit him, pretend to protect him from imaginary dangers), *The Death Ray*, a fantastic story of which the action passes in Russia and abroad, *According to the Law (Expiation)*, *Your Woman Friend* and *The Cheerful Canary*.



## CHAPTER III.

### EISENSTEIN.

When I was a child I saw a group of conscripts marched through the Paris streets. I was too young to be a pacifist, being about eight, with all my natural inclinations towards fighting. But the spectacle remained bitten into my memory as degradation. For the crowd nudged each other and whispered "les conscrits" and the men marched between two lines of soldiers. From the picture I understood tyranny. For it is only what the mind experiences that makes understanding.

Later on I hated the idea of Russia. It seemed formless and tyrannical. Ponderous of landscape. Sprawled over the map without shape. Heavy with force. I read, as a matter of duty, translations of the Russian classic authors and hated them for their formless, introspective nibblings at existence. Life was dreadful, but they didn't seem to have any constructive plan about it. So, though I felt early that I wanted to accept all countries on an equal international basis, I knew it would be hardest to accept Russia.

When the Revolution came I was vaguely interested. It must be remembered that in 1917 one was in no condition to accept freshly any nation's experiment in which one's interest was merely abstract. The personal problems about one's own country were sufficiently difficult to preclude the diffusion of what small energy the War left one into such distant channels. And it is not generally realized abroad how strict the English censorship of news was. Quite well-informed people have said to me since: "But did you really have a food shortage in England? Was there really discomfort experienced through the air-raids?" In 1917, and for some years after, only those English who had been

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interested in Russian revolutionary attempts *before* the War continued their interest in Russia.<sup>9</sup> For the mass of the English, their own recuperative problems and their own desire to work out an improvement of conditions at home, kept them for a time from examining the Russian situation. A proof of this is the fact ~~that~~ looking over books on the Revolution written in English, nearly all of them between 1917 and 1925 will be found to have been written by Americans. For America was not exhausted, but merely provoked, stirred up and excited over the War, and for that reason most of the protests and many of the best appraisements of the folly of strife have come out of America. They had a bad time for a few months, but enough strength left to protest afterwards. In Europe it was usually the rebels who got shot first, and the few that survived wanted only to forget and to escape even from thought of protest.

I myself did not follow the Revolution carefully. Except that I was glad it had happened, and I, of course, discounted the stories of atrocities. Not that again one did not realize (from one's studies of the French Revolution) that many unpleasing incidents and some injustice must have taken place. But one cannot discount responsibility, and one could not help feeling from what one had read of France in the eighteenth century, that if one class deliberately refuses education to another they are asking for trouble if anything happens and cannot therefore expect much sympathy. Though I was not, and am not now, interested very deeply in politics. For politics seldom touch vital aspects of life. Questions of justice or health or progress. These get lost under party politics and intrigue, whether red or white or black happens to be in power. The soul of the world can be changed only by attacking conditions from a psychological point of view, not a conventional one, whether it be the convention of the Left or the convention of the Right.

It is true that psychological knowledge has only been available for a few years, thanks to Freud, the pioneer, and to other forces and experiments. Even Russia has not yet dared to attack environment from a completely straight point of view. Even

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Russia is still tied up, for the most part, to its own conception of morals. .

So, as I repeat, I did not study the Revolution. While it was utterly impossible for me to sympathize with pre-War white Russia, I could not agree with the revolutionary sympathizers in England who concentrated their emotions upon what was and is, to me, a false idea. That is, politics. What I wished to discover was the possibility of an *entirely different life*.

The country that then interested me was America. But having studied it for many years, it seemed to me that they were not so advanced in many respects as Europe. They were not so tolerant. And by laying stress upon the outward symbols of community life they tended to destroy independence, while the real facing of human problems was obscured by prohibitions; although on the surface they appeared to have greater freedom of choice than Europeans have. As an example of what I mean, one has only to instance the average American attitude towards the negro question, and those of its citizens who find it preferable to live in Europe. They seem so seldom able to realize that the very pioneer spirit that drove the grandfather across the Atlantic and across the prairies may, after two generations, force the grandchild as legitimately back. With excellent result to Europe, where already many children of mixed American-European parentage have achieved distinction.

It was not until I saw *Bed and Sofa* that I discovered Russia. It ~~was~~ the first film to attack life itself, as opposed to politics. It is silly to speak of a new world. It was not that, but something infinitely more exciting. It was this world taking a step *forward*.

From that day I began to read all I could about Russia and to see every Russian film available. And the story of modern Russia is so inseparably bound up with the Revolution that it is essential to see, if possible, Eisenstein's *Ten Days* and Pudovkin's *End of St. Petersburg*.

*Ten Days*—it is true I have an historical mind—I feel is the greatest film yet made. This is not the accepted opinion, I know, for Berlin is said to prefer Pudovkin's *End of St. Petersburg*, but for myself I like Eisenstein's swiftness and

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hardness and impenetrable inhumanity, which is perhaps the greatest humanity. Pudovkin has characters, but Eisenstein has events. I have seen it three times, and each time it lifts the mind higher until one feels as actually as if one were in a swift aeroplane, that indescribable sensation of leaving the ground with engines gathering speed and mountains dropping beneath one.

It is hard to understand why *Ten Days* has not been shown in England. I had always thought the English had a sense of fair play. I have said and written that the English were often stupid beyond belief and wasteful, but that they had, more than French or Italian or American, a sense of abstract justice. I still believe this of a mass of English. But I shall soon have to accept it as another illusion if films such as *Ten Days*, full of dignity and beauty, are forbidden, while any film is permitted that shows some aristocratic Russian female snatching her virginity in the nick of time from a howling mob and flying in heavy furs pursued by wolves across the frontier.

For the one thing I have yet to find in a Russian film is vulgarity. Sometimes they are not true to type, sometimes they are dull, exaggerated or conventional. But I cannot remember seeing any vulgar scene, which is such a welcome change when so many made-to-pattern pictures rely on vulgarity alone to get across.

Eisenstein was, of course, the first Russian to be universally known abroad, owing to the amazing success of *Potemkin*. He was born in Riga, in the north of Russia, in 1898, and was trained as an engineer and architect. From his early childhood he showed great aptitude for drawing. He finished his studies at the time of the War and entered the Institute of Civil Engineers at Leningrad as a student. He became very interested in the Renaissance, and particularly in Leonardo da Vinci, in 1916. It was while he was studying the personality of the great Italian that he discovered Freud's book, *Concerning the Childhood Reminiscences of Da Vinci*. This study impressed him so much that he began to make a serious study of the teaching of Freud, and he is still an adherent of the materialistic portion of Freud's teaching. He was also attracted by the Japanese drama and art comedy. In 1918 he entered the Red Army as a volunteer, and worked at the front on



G: Vicarovich, Eisenstein's assistant on all occasions, and co-director of *The General Line*



S: M. Eisenstein director of *Paganini*, *Ten Days*, and *The General Line*



from *The General Line*, Eisenstein's latest Soyuzkino film, heralded as yet another revelation of cinema progress



A wonderful type study from *The General Line*

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field-fortification. In 1920 he began to work as an artist with one of the theatrical companies at the front. Demobilised in the autumn of 1920, he went to Moscow, where he entered the Academy of the General Staff in the Eastern Section. There he met the director of the first workers' theatre in the world and shortly afterwards joined the staff of this theatre in the capacity of manager of the theatrical decoration department. His first work was the staging of Jack London's story, *The Mexican*. He worked the following year with Meyerhold, but soon separated from him. In 1923 he made his first independent picture, *It is a Good Horse That Never Stumbles*, from the play by the classic writer, Ostrovsky, which was converted into a circus farce.

Some time previously Eisenstein studied the teaching of Marx and made it the basis of his world outlook, having previously passed through all the stages of idealistic philosophy. In 1922 he became acquainted with the reflexological school of Pavlov, and practically and theoretically applied this materialistic system to the domain of artistic creation. In 1924 he began to work at cinematography and constructed his first mass film, *The Strike*.

I tried to see this film in Berlin, as a copy was sent there some time ago. Through the courtesy of the editor of *Film Technik* a hunt began which ended finally in a joke. And must have cost quite a pound in telephone calls! As far as it could be discovered *The Strike* had been bought by firm A, who, unable to dispose of it, sold it to firm B, who in turn sold it to C, who held it in storage. After the success of *Potemkin*, firm A re-bought the picture at a bigger price than they had sold it for originally, but being still timorous of its success sold it to firm D. And then it disappeared. There seemed to be a rumor that it had been cut up for topicality, but I cannot be sure of this, for at this moment my German gave out with my temper. At any rate, it was cut up and destroyed. Reliable critics who have seen it tell me that while it had some excellent moments, notably one where the police turned hoses on strikers running up steps in mid-winter, so that they were driven back by the water freezing on them, it was by no means as interesting as one would have imagined knowing Eisenstein's later work.

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I should have preferred to form my own opinion, however, and hope a copy has been preserved in Moscow.

In 1923-4 Eisenstein, together with his assistant Alexandroff, completed *Potemkin*. *Potemkin* was really merely a fragment from a much larger film that was to deal with the entire 1905 Revolution. It took four months, and was made in Odessa itself. Curiously enough it was not very successful in Russia, it is said, but from the first showing in Berlin began to exert more influence upon the development of the cinema than any other film has done to date. After *Potemkin* Eisenstein began to work on *The General Line*, which was first called *The Village*. After nearly a year, however, he was obliged to leave this unfinished in order to make *October*, now called *Ten Days That Shook the World*, from the narrative of the events of the 1917 Revolution by the American, John Reed. (An edition of this book, which is invaluable to all students of Russia, is issued by Modern Books, 26, Bedford Row, London, price 2s.) *Ten Days* was to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Revolution, and there is a rumor abroad that Eisenstein was so unwilling to give up his film in what he considered an incomplete state, to be ready in time, that to get it from him he had to be threatened with Siberia. But probably this is a joke. If it did not happen it is the sort of thing that might happen, for—although one should not compare the cinema with any other art—*Potemkin* and *Ten Days* remind one that the beginnings of most arts are epic and recall by their austerity and power of compression the Homeric phrases and the siege of Troy.

After the showing of *Ten Days*, Eisenstein returned to his work on *The General Line*, which is now completed. A copy is expected in Berlin during the spring.

*Potemkin* is the one Russian film about which quite a number of English articles have been written. Even the story is comparatively well known.

It begins on the Black Sea, where a group of sailors refuse to eat their meat ration, which is swarming with maggots. The commander of the vessel orders a certain number of the crew to be covered with a tarpaulin and shot. At the moment of firing,



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the sailors refuse to shoot their own comrades and turn—not knowing what else to do to save themselves—on the officers. In the ensuing fight the leader of the sailors is killed. His body is taken ashore and hundreds of sympathizers in Odessa crowd to the steps and take food out to the ship in boats. Women watch with babies; old ladies smile and stare out to sea. Treacherously, from behind, rows of Cossacks march slowly down the steps, firing. The populace is shot down, forced into the water. The battleship steams out towards the Fleet. All are prepared for death. Suddenly, instead of shots, the Red Flag is hoisted and the crews of the rest of the Fleet assemble along the rails to greet their comrades.

This is the film that is considered so dangerous in London that instant imprisonment is threatened to anyone who shows a foot of it, even privately! Apparently to serve meat swarming with maggots and to shoot remorselessly at women and children watching a scene whose import they barely understand is, when you reason it out, perfectly legitimate! Because this is what such a prohibition amounts to. Yet there were people in England, conventional and unrevolutionary, who protested before the War about conditions in Russia. There have been plenty of Englishmen also to protest against injustice all over the world. It is not altogether surprising that military authorities should fight the film, for I witnessed some scenes of the training of English *volunteer* recruits at the beginning of the War that were almost as brutal as the serving of the infected meat. But the average Englishman was too independent to stand for too much general oppression. Therefore what surprises me is the lack of men to protest and fight such censorship. One wonders what has happened to the young. You would have thought that there would have been articles, poems, even projects of flying in a copy from Moscow and projecting it in a cellar. One can visualize a high-spirited youth kidnapping the censors responsible for the prohibition and forcing them to witness the film four or five times over till they cheered the Red Flag in order to get released. Certainly one feels Hazlitt, or Landor, or Browning, or Swinburne, would have had something to say about it. Instead of which, in a film book published last

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year, there is the bald statement: "*Potemkin* is a Russian film, and so, of course, cannot be shown in England." Made not ironically, to judge from what follows, but simply as a matter for acceptance. There are plenty of grumbles in labor and communist papers. But they don't do anything about the censorship. And besides that, *Potemkin* is too great to be forced into the limits of party politics. Put the uncut version suddenly before a totally conventional audience and I think they would cheer at the end. (I do not count the American version, because much of the film was cut out and propaganda organised to discredit the picture.) To feed any mass of men on decayed food is to invite disaster. The most autocratic rulers the world has known have won their battles looking after the cooking pots of their soldiers. In this film the struggle is really not between White and Red, but between stupidity and common sense.

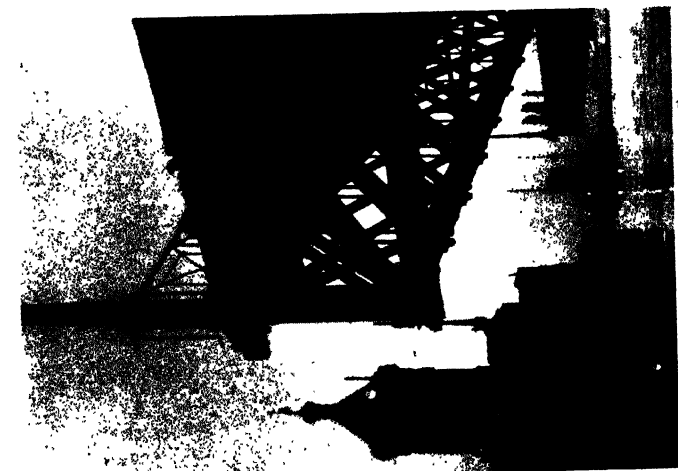
No two people have agreed as to the most beautiful moments of *Potemkin*—tribute to the amazing unity of its achievement. The march down the steps is historic (and how often it has been badly copied since), others prefer the opening of the film, others the triumphant unfurling of the Red Flag at the end. For myself, I prefer the passing of the crowds through little countryside paths, through roads and under bridges, into Odessa at dawn. Disillusioned masses suddenly touched with hope. Like a rumor that war had ceased in war that made for a moment uncertainty, darkness and hunger bearable. The sense, too, of the effect of the sailors' action upon crowds not yet brave enough of themselves to rebel.

*Potemkin* was first shown in Germany in a censored version, but about eighteen months ago the complete Russian version was authorized and has been shown continuously there ever since. An attempt was made secretly to stop German soldiers in some places from seeing the film, but it failed. It was shown in Austria and through most of Switzerland. Many private showings were given in France. A mutilated version was sent to America. Altogether, it has been screened in thirty-six countries of the world. A cut version was projected before the L.C.C. They refused permission for it to be shown and would give no reasons for their action.

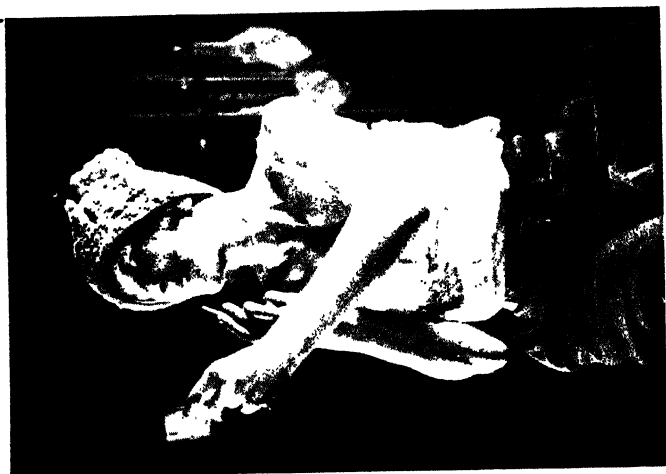


-GENERAL-  
EISENSTEIN

Eisenstein (left) taking a close-up for *The General Line* The cameraman is L. Tisse, as in *Ter Dact*



From *Ten Days That Shook The World*: Eisenstein's film to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Soviet Republic



One of the Women's Army, off duty in the Winter Palace. From *Ten Days That Shook The World*.

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(What a wonderful film might be made of this incident.) A Film Renter showed it to his staff, only to be rung up by Scotland Yard before the film was off the projector, with threats as to what would happen if he dared project it again. Yet if *Potemkin* had the potency with which they credit it, it would surely have caused a revolution in Germany and Austria, where there is much poverty and hardship. But these nations have passed the test of seeing it freely without anything untoward happening. It *Potemkin* could start a war against the censorship it would be wonderful. But I am awfully afraid that if it were shown freely in London, when the lights snapped on in the cinema, people would just start wondering if they would catch their bus, and was it raining, and weren't those Russian faces odd, and wasn't it queer the way those women got hysterical on the steps about something that didn't concern them, and they would go to bed quite smugly thinking that the British Empire just couldn't offer rations like that to the Navy (forgetting the Mutiny of the Nore), but it was the sort of thing you would expect to happen on those foreign ships. "An army marches on its stomach." Personally, as long as there is an army, I should use *Potemkin* as an educational and propaganda film at Sandhurst and at Woolwich.

Eisenstein's third film, *Ten Days That Shook the World* (first called *October*), was prepared for the tenth anniversary of the Revolution. It was shown in Berlin early in 1928. I prefer it to *Potemkin*, though this is not the general opinion of the critics.

St. Petersburg, 1917. The Provisional Government is perched upon conflicting intrigues and emotions. Huge statues watch wide streets. They are guarded in turn by a gigantic figure of the Tsar. These architectural shots have the cruelty and impressiveness and power of old temple walls in the East. Walls made by human labor in the sun; and these statues flung in contrast to them, like icebergs on a sea. A cold, great city with an Eastern mind, set north. One is reminded suddenly of Constantinople.

The giant statue of the Tsar looks across streets.

The head falls almost in slow motion; an arm follows, and another arm. The throne topples forward.

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Women wait for bread in the streets. The children are too weak from hunger to cry.

Kerensky enters the Winter Palace. A line of officials salute him. They are rather old, a little worried. As he shakes hands they smile: "What a democrat," meaning "What a king."

He goes slowly up the staircase. This is a great moment. The officials relax; the atmosphere of the Palace will not be unduly disturbed. Kerensky pauses at the door of the throne room, for this is the symbol of the ruler; with sudden decision he turns the handle and walks in.

Bread gets scarcer and prices go higher. And war continues.

A railway station at the frontier.

There are crowds and banners; expectant rhythm of expectant faces. Something is about to happen. But until it happens there are so many reasons that might prevent it; particularly when it means hope, and bread, and freedom.

The crowd is stiff and still; it is like some ancient photograph of a news event years ago.

Then it breaks suddenly, as if it itself had become lightning, and somewhere a leg emerges but is lost, for faces and hands and bodies crush over the screen and sway back again—Lenin has come back to Russia.

Hungry and dissatisfied, a demonstration marches over the bridge from the workers' section of the town towards the Government offices. A red flag is borne at their head in an old broken cab drawn by a decrepit white horse.

Bread. Land. Peace.

A Government official telephones the order for the bridge to be lifted. Shots ring out. Machine guns scatter the crowds. The giant mechanism of the bridge begins to revolve and move. Little frightened figures race toward firm ground. A dead woman lies across the join of the two sections; her hair drops an inch, and as the sections slowly part, another inch. The cab tilts backwards, but the shot white horse dangles by a strap, high over the Neva. Two halves of road are high in air and the starved horse is a symbol over all Petersburg till, suddenly, the leather snaps.

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Matrons with parasols watch the crowds break. Fat, comfortable women, young girls and officers flirting behind statues, look on and laugh.

Bread. Land. Peace.

As the demonstration scatters, old ladies dig their parasols into starving faces trying to save flags and leaflets. Papers are scattered over the Neva. A disarmed mutinous regiment is marched to prison, under the jeers of the crowd.

The statue of the Tsar springs, piece by piece, into position again. •

Kerensky fêtes his victory. Women become hysterical when he speaks. In his room, alone, he fits glass flagons together, his fingers play with a secret spring in the table. He takes out the crown. Slips it back. Turning, he sees a statue of Napoleon and instinctively, as he goes up the stairs, assumes its pose.

Kornilof and his Cossacks march towards St. Petersburg.

A Red Guard and a Worker go out toward the Cossacks. They change the points to stop the train. And hide. The vans full of Cossacks come to a standstill. Wild, rough faces peer into the darkness. They feel for rifles. The two men advance cautiously : "What are you fighting for?" They talk. They pass round leaflets. And the Cossacks wonder and whisper. Who exactly is it that they are fighting? Suddenly they break into laughter and jokes. They also want bread and peace. (The effect here of change from suspicion to good-temper is marvellously achieved. Flashes of heads give the entirely psychological effects of argument and the abrupt acceptance of a new idea by a mass : first only war could please them, then as suddenly they change. For they are ignorant, raw material, very different from the workers and the Red Guard.) And the night ends in laughter and wild dances on the deserted muddy fields beside the railway.

A great meeting hall. A man enters with his face tied in a cloth, as with toothache, and with his collar turned up. He sits very silently, but one or two members of the opposition stare and whisper and query. "The gentlemen seem to have recognised me." He has come then, Lenin. Workers, soldiers, officials, cripples, crowd into the benches. There are still many against

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the Revolution, and more hesitate. "There must be no force," men say, and "Kornilof nears St. Petersburg." Reporters come in and take their places at a table. "You cannot keep power if you take it." Shout and counter-shout. Expressions change on faces. "We must be calm." Men argue. Compromise. But a young soldier leaps up to shout the Twelfth Army is with the Bolsheviks. In a rush of votes and shouting and stamping the active work of the Revolution begins.

It is quite impossible to describe the rhythm of this scene and the way in which it sways from confidence to expectancy, from compromise and fear, to the final triumphant rush of the workers to seek arms and free the soldiers and political prisoners.

And the opposition?

An empty chair stands at the end of a long table.

There is a motor car at the palace gate. Kerensky, angry and irritable, turns to the waiting officials: "Gentlemen, I go to rally our soldiers to protect the constitution." He sees from their faces they do not believe him, and jumps angrily into the car.

They dash along surprised, deserted streets.

Men arm; typewriters click.

A long table is set, in the Winter Palace, with different varieties of beautifully carved glass. Elaborate chandeliers swing overhead. (These shots, all that are used to suggest the luxury and state of the court, are shattering in their restraint. Contrast them and their effect with scenes shown usually in films to suggest ceremony and waste.) Kerensky's women soldiers help to construct hurried barricades. At nightfall they scatter to different rooms, throw off rough coats to reveal ribbons and underwear and powder. This is hysteria; not the quiet determination of the convinced woman fighter.

There is no lifting of the bridge this time. Sailors take possession of it and guard the machinery. The mayor of St. Petersburg, a delegation of old men behind him, is turned back by a sailor.

Men climb up to the top of the Winter Palace and enter by seldom used stairways.



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Lorries full of the Red Guard jolt in the darkness towards the Palace. The vast courtyard is deserted. Two men go forward warily, bearing a white flag. They look, they move swiftly from arch to pillar, but there are no soldiers. There is only a woman in uniform at the barricades, arm in sling, and looking exactly like the matron of a war time Red Cross depot. They hand over a paper; the defenders of the Palace are offered twenty minutes to surrender.

The Red Guard waits impatiently. The two men with the white flag sit shivering on the steps. Inside the Palace there is chaos. One or two of the women wonder . . . a number fling down their rifles and slip away. Others wait grimly at the barricades with bayonets.

Midnight. The gun of the *Aurora* gives the signal.

There is a rush forward, over the barricades, into the halls of the Palace, up the stairs. The ministers of the Provisional Government are sitting in the council room. Before they can realise what has happened they are arrested, shoved aside, and members of the Bolshevik Government take their places. There is no time to lose if the Revolution is to be successful.

Some of the townspeople, hungry and cold, begin to pillage the cellars, but the Red Guard soon restores order. Everyone is searched as they go out, and when the people are tempted by the bottles of wine, men drive bayonets through the casks.

Shots shift from rushing feet up long staircases to crowds moving through streets and soldiers on guard along the Palace walls. The movement gets swifter; shot is cut into shot. Until light creeps across the sky on laughing faces and a new city.

But how describe this film? It is all rhythm, all movement. I have seen *Ten Days* three times, twice by courtesy of Prometheus and once in a tiny Berlin kino. I have seen it without music at nine o'clock in the morning; the more austere the circumstance the greater its effect. And of all the films I know, I feel it to be the greatest. In fact, had I the desire and opportunity to make a film myself, I should ask as preparation for it to be run through a score of times, because I seemed to learn from it more of what cinematography really was, than from any other picture or theory.

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Perhaps it is because its entire appeal is to the intellect—not to the emotions solely, but to the brain, which is beyond emotion—the super or over-conscious, that is habitually so starved. There is not a shot in the picture that has not been created by mind alone. It is interesting to note that Eisenstein was once interested in Leonardo da Vinci, for the two have this in common, a desire for universal knowledge. It is possible to record an event emotionally, as Stabavoi has done in *Two Days*, or Pudovkin in *Storm Over Asia*, and the result can be very great. It is much more difficult to base the appeal upon a knowledge of each incident and its interrelation with history, science and mechanics, and yet to achieve as emotional an effect, through penetrating below emotion to the truth beneath. For instance, in comparing the treatment of Kerensky in this film and in *The End of St. Petersburg*, his actual flight in Pudovkin's film, though more personal, cannot achieve the power of the single empty chair, which throws back at the receptive spectator whole cycles of history.

Eisenstein has said that *October* (the Russian title of *Ten Days*), while on the one hand it continues the tradition of *Potemkin* in having no actor and no individual heroes, is, on the other, an experiment towards a completely new form of kino for the future—"intellectual cinematography." The intellectual cinema, following the line of the "risen lions" of *Potemkin*, of Kerensky mounting the staircase of the Winter Palace, and the gods in *Ten Days*, must lead the way to completely new forms, at the same time composing a synthesis of all the various forms of cinematography already existing: the emotional and pathetic picture, the documentary chronicle and the absolute film.

In both *Potemkin* and *Ten Days*, Eisenstein was assisted by Alexandroff. Grigori Vasilievitch Alexandroff was born in 1903 at Ekaterinburg (now Sverdlovsk). While still studying at the gymnasium there he entered the service of the municipal theatre when he was nine years old, acting as errand boy to the assistant manager.

He worked at the theatre for five years, from 1912 to the October Revolution of 1917, as assistant to the furnisher, the costumer, the hairdresser, the decorator and the electro-technician. In the

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summer, when the theatre was closed, he worked at the cinema-theatre, where he assisted the mechanician.

In 1918 he entered the short courses in stage-management at the Workers' and Peasants' Theatre. After completing the courses he worked in the theatrical department in the capacity of instructor and censor of kino pictures (this was the beginning of his attraction towards cinematography), and to this period belongs his work at the front (organisation of military clubs, etc.).

In 1921 he began to work in the "Mexican" Studio of the Moscow Prolet-Kult. His first appearance on the Moscow stage was in the role of a newspaper-seller in the "Mexican" film directed by S. M. Eisenstein and V. S. Smishliaeva. He played various types during this period under different managers, including womens' and old mens' parts.

In S. M. Eisenstein's film, *It is a Good Horse That Never Stumbles*, at the Prolet-Kult theatre, he worked as assistant and played the part of Goloutvin (the man in the mask). He also performed acrobatic and circus feats on the trapeze and tight-rope.

He worked jointly with Eisenstein in all his productions, and took part in working out the plans of construction. Together with Eisenstein, he began to reflect on cinema work.

In 1924, as assistant to Eisenstein, he began to work with him and with V. Pletnief on the scenario and plans for *The Strike*. In 1925 he worked as assistant director on *Potemkin*, in which he also appeared as the officer Giliarovsky.

In 1926 Eisenstein and he composed the scenario for *The General Line*. In 1927 he helped to compose the scenario and direct *Ten Days*.

He was working up to the present time, in the capacity of assistant manager to Eisenstein, on *The General Line*, and is also acting as teacher in the stage management class at the G.T.K. (State Technical School for Cinematography). He is working also in a number of social organisations, where he occupies responsible positions.

Eisenstein's cameraman for all films is E. Tisse.

When *Ten Days* was finished Eisenstein went back to *The General Line*. This film has now been completed, but no copy

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had come to Berlin when I was last there. I saw, however, a collection of about one hundred stills, and the subject of the picture is as interesting as those of his other films. For it is the attempt to show how Russia can improve its food supplies and revolutionise village life by the introduction of motor tractors and modern agricultural machinery.

I know very little about farming, but the attitude of many people that all would be well if boys and girls stuck to the land instead of crowding into cities always has annoyed me. I have lived for a short while in a village, and as a rule the standards of life and education are so far below those in towns that one can only respect those who try to get out of such an environment. The land is all very well if you are walking over it, or planting flower seeds, or growing a vegetable patch. It is certainly more amusing to pluck wild daffodils than to buy flowers in a flower shop. But it is not amusing to watch Greek peasants crouched over uneven ground gathering olives into baskets for sometimes twelve hours at a stretch because they have no modern machinery. (It is estimated, for instance, that a fourth of the entire olive crop is lost in the south because they have not the means to install up-to-date appliances.) And it is the same thing that happens on a greater scale in Russia.

Again, I have never understood the objection to machinery made by presumably educated people. And their clamor for things "hand-made" or "hand-worked." I read a few months ago an appalling story in a report on the Rural Industries of England, of a man who worked eleven and twelve hours a day making baskets by hand at the uncertain wage of thirty-five shillings a week. It was further stated that his hands became unrecognisable at the end of a week's work through constant immersion in water alternating with forcing rough twigs into basket shape. And still people talk about hand labor and keeping old industries alive! As long as people in villages have to rise before dawn and go to bed near midnight in a constant endeavour to sow, weed, destroy insects, reap and harvest before storm and snow and rain cheat them of food, with much of this work toil of the most arduous and soul destroying nature, so long will life in villages mean gossip,

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interference, cruelty and ignorance; exactly, in fact, as Priobrashenskaya has shown it in *The Peasant Women of Riazan*. But mercifully, and this is progress and civilization, life in villages need not mean these things if modern machinery and methods can be installed. Only in Russia there is not solely the struggle first to provide the money for the machinery, but they have so few trained men able to demonstrate the working of the machines or able to do minor repairs. Their population is not familiar with machinery, as the peoples are of Western Europe. As far as one is able to judge from a superficial examination, the average American child is more mechanically inclined than the corresponding European boy or girl, because they have more frequent opportunities at an earlier age of examining machinery. But there are whole sections of Siberia where the peasants are barely familiar with the railway. To introduce modern methods in Russia means a continuous fight against superstition, habit and definite antagonism, together with the problem of having so few men equipped to go out as instructors.

Faced with this problem they remembered that powerful weapon to fight ignorance, the cinema. And it is safe to say that wherever *The General Line* is shown, agriculture and motor tractors will be subjects on everybody's lips, and occupying every mind.

A Russian to whom I had applied for permission to see Pudovkin's *Mechanics of the Brain*, said to me: "Russia has little money, but we are sending educational films into the poorest villages. If they cannot afford to pay from sixpence to threepence, which is the usual price charged to see these films, we show them in the villages for nothing, to educate them. England is a rich country. What are you doing?" And (remembering that I had just read in *The Times Educational Supplement* that there were still over five hundred schools on the Black List and one hundred and sixty thousand scholars) I had to reply, "Very little."

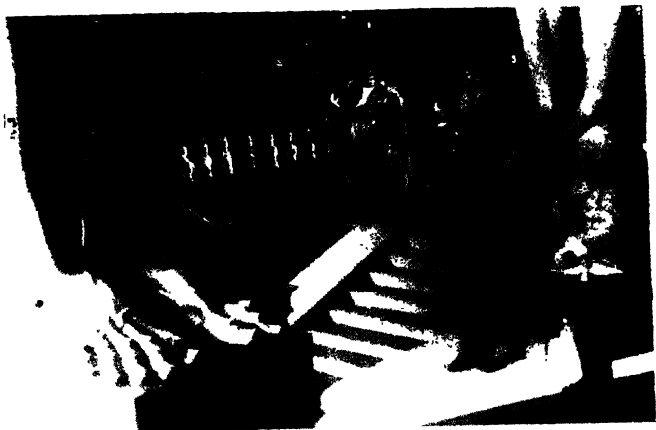
This is not quite correct, of course, for there are numbers of people in England working hard on various educational problems. And the general average education of the nation is far higher than that of the Russian peasant, whose opportunity for learning has

## FILM PROBLEMS OF SOVIET RUSSIA

only just begun. But English educational authorities, as a whole, have done nothing to adapt themselves to modern developments, and we squander magnificent material yearly as a result. And when one considers that Russia, after ten years of war, revolution, famine, disease and death, has the vitality to make a film such as *The General Line*, in an attempt to educate and improve the condition of a vast agricultural population, one wonders that the most conventionally-minded Englishman does not accept this side of Russia's work, whatever may be his feelings about the rest of the country.

The stills are very lovely. Picked up at random, they might be reproductions from some museum or gallery except that pictures, however beautiful, seldom have that quality of life. Particularly remarkable are some old peasants' heads, nor is the grim, unpleasing side of village life absent, for there was one picture of a rather fat woman that has all the meanness and cruelty of some village autocrat, bullying the boys and girls in innumerable little ways, secure from interference. And there seems to be at least one humorous episode, where the tractor apparently refuses to work or is worked the wrong way. The corn and flowers covering the fields emphasise the richness of the landscape.

Eisenstein, it is said, will shortly go to Hollywood. With a director less sure of his method, one might be afraid. For very few directors or actors have survived the Californian studios. But one does not fear with Eisenstein. His work is too integral a part of him to suffer from American influence. His films there, if he makes any, may be failures. Because he may be forced by the authorities to compromise, or they may even snatch the film from his hands and give it to someone else to cut. They can do that while he is in Hollywood, but directly he leaves one feels he will shake off their influence like water. On the other hand it is possible that, as there has been such a complete collapse in Hollywood the past year, and as the power of the bigger companies is gradually weakening, Eisenstein might be given a freer hand, in which case there might be interesting developments. Think of the science of Hollywood rightly used. And the film that he might make of the differing elements of many-peopled America.



*From Ten Days That Shook The World*



*From Ten Days That Shook The World*



*Photo courtesy of Narco's*  
V. I. Pudovkin at work cutting his film



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At the present time in Russia, in addition to film construction, Eisenstein is working upon the theoretical problems of the Soviet kino and is lecturing in the stage-management section of the State Technical School of Cinematography. He is also head of the Kino section of the psycho-physical laboratories for the study of the audience.

## CHAPTER IV.

### PUDOVKIN.

Vsevolod Pudovkin was born in Moscow and educated at the lycee there. He afterwards entered the University and studied chemistry; this was no doubt of great value in his later cinematographic work. He volunteered upon the outbreak of War in 1914 (possibly this accounts for the perfect moment in *The End of St. Petersburg*, when war hysteria is shown at its true value), and after fighting in the trenches was taken prisoner. During a long captivity in Germany he studied several foreign languages and made some illustrations for books.

After the Armistice he returned to Russia and studied as an actor at Kuleshof's school. He helped in some of the first experiments when they had still no equipment and no raw stock. He then acted in three films and went on to the organisation of the Russ, which shortly afterwards developed into the Meschrabpom-Russ. He is as noted for his acting in Russia as he is for his directing, and his films are very popular throughout the country.

The first film he directed was a short two-reel one called *The Chess Player*. This has never been shown outside Russia. This was followed by an educational film, made in collaboration with Professor Pavlov, called *Mechanics of the Brain*. He then made *Mother* and *The End of St. Petersburg*. His fifth film, *Storm Over Asia*, has been shown in Russia and Germany. It is said that he is now going to work on *Germinal*, from the story by Emile Zola. He recently finished acting the chief part in *The Living Corpse*, from the story by Tolstoy.

Of his films, only *Mother* and *The End of St. Petersburg* have been shown in England, at single Sunday afternoon performances

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of the Film Society. *The End of St. Petersburg* has been shown also with great success, but in a cut version, in New York.

Had Pudovkin been born earlier, before the discovery of the cinema, he would assuredly have had a hard struggle to decide whether he would have become a doctor or, as I have said before, a painter. Perhaps science would eventually have claimed him : in addition to the cinematic quality of the scenes, no scientist bent upon reporting minutely a series of facts for sheerly educational purposes could better the recording of the Mongolian dances from an ethnographical point of view, or the operation from the medical, in *Storm Over Asia*. And, of course, the entire film of *Mechanics of the Brain* is recorded with the precision of pure science.

Perhaps none of the Russian directors have so used their own life and experience as Pudovkin has. I do not mean by this that he has used any incidents from it in his films, only that they are the result of introspection and the sharp stinging of his own experience. Only a volunteer who had been through the successive phases of war hysteria and destruction could have recorded, one feels, those marvellous war sequences in *The End of St. Petersburg*. And perhaps imprisonment tends to develop concentration of the visual sense, for it is interesting to note in this connection that the greatest of the German directors, G. W. Pabst, also spent several years in France as a prisoner of war.

Pudovkin's second film, *Mechanics of the Brain*, was made in collaboration with Professor Pavlov, upon Pavlov's experiments on the conditioned reflexes. It has been shown widely in Russia as part of an educational programme to familiarise the people with modern scientific developments, and a version of it was shown by the Film Arts Guild of New York last year. It has not been shown in public in Europe, partly on account of the expense of translating the sub-titles, but Mr. Montagu has now a copy in London. I was shown it by courtesy of the Russian Handelsvertretung in Berlin, with Russian sub-titles only.

Pavlov's work on the brain has been familiar to European doctors and scientists for the past quarter of a century ; he contends that his experiments, upon the ease or difficulty of establishing a conditioned reflex should be of extreme value in the education of

## FILM PROBLEMS OF SOVIET RUSSIA

children. And while he may seem to ignore some of the new developments in the study of the mind, his attempts to relate physiology and brain process are undoubtedly of great value.

The film begins with scenes in a zoo, with children feeding animals, and afterwards children swimming. The next reel shows the well-known experiments upon dogs. Food in a dog's mouth is naturally productive of saliva; an unconditioned reflex. From long-continued association the mere sight of food will produce of itself saliva, and therefore a conditioned reflex.

On paper this sounds complicated. Everything is clear, watched on the screen. An artificial opening is made "in the salivary duct from the paratid gland", and a glass balloon is fixed to the opening and connected by tubes with a recording instrument in another room. The dog is shown eating and the balloon fills with saliva. Further shots show it filling when the dog is merely shown food and before the food reaches the mouth. Another experiment showed a metronome being started and just after a hundred beats the dog was always fed. After this has been repeated a number of times the dog began to secrete saliva at the start of the metronome. But if a metronome of fifty beats is started and no food is given and this also is repeated a number of times, the dog produces less and less saliva at each repetition and a negative conditioned stimulus has arisen.

Other experiments were shown with monkeys. A bell rings, or at a certain metronome beat, a blue plate full of food is pushed within the monkey's reach. As soon as the monkey hears the accustomed sound it climbs down hurriedly towards the expected morsel. But if another sequence of beats or a red plate be used the monkey remains on his perch, totally uninterested. Other experiments on frogs followed, and towards the end of the film we saw how a conditioned reflex might be formed in a child.

The child lay happily and easily on a table, unable to see the operator concealed in another room. A funnel was suspended above his mouth. There was a band round his arm. The experimenter pressed a bulb which caused a slight friction against the skin of the arm, and at the same moment a sweet dropped into

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the child's mouth. This was repeated several times, to the child's obvious satisfaction. Finally the experimenter pressed the bulb that caused friction, but no sweet dropped, though the child's eyes were fixed on the funnel. After this had been repeated a few times the child did not attempt to respond to the signal, but stared around the room, for even at so early an age it uses its mind and an automatic reflex is far less easily accomplished. It is said that children develop reflexes more easily than animals and retain them longer without practice, but they are also liable to be destroyed more quickly.

Pictures of idiots followed, and of a man in an advanced stage of syphilis, etc. Some of these were shown eating and contrasted with animals being fed. It is said that the idiot's brain was no more developed than that of a fish, and certainly the resemblance between some of these types and the less intelligent animals was remarkable, in the way both snatched at and spilled their food.

Pavlov claims that these experiments are doing much to discover the nature of sleep and neurasthenia, and that he is able to produce both in his dogs by giving them too difficult problems to solve. He has stated also that there will be no absolute freedom of the will, in his opinion, until the physiology of the brain be understood.

The greatest part of the film, however, is the final section, where close-ups of a woman's face are shown during child-birth. These shots were more full of pain and terror and helplessness than anything ever written, and perhaps (because it was an actual record of an actual event) than anything Pudovkin has done in films since. The end of *Mother*, where the woman is cut down by the trampling horsemen, is but a sketch in comparison. It is, of course, not generally realised that (probably because of sexual taboos and inhibitions) progress in painless child-birth has been neglected and research in these matters has not kept pace with modern medical development. It is said, for instance, that the subject being one in which major academic distinction can no longer be gained in the American medical colleges, only those men just able to scrape through the course are taking obstetrics, with the result that the death rate of women in child-birth in the United States is one of the highest in the world and is steadily mounting. Medical

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students have told me that there is a great unwillingness to use to their full extent those methods of preventing pain already known, as it means that the doctors must wait too many hours with each woman. In this connection it is worth while to quote Dr. Ernest Jones in *Psycho-Analysis*, Benn's Sixpenny Library, No. 153. He says on page 52 : " The scant respect paid to psychology in medical education is, perhaps, not altogether unconnected with the way in which sexual problems are shirked there. Among the laity the impression prevails that doctors have occult knowledge of such matters, and sexual problems are often euphemistically referred to as ' medical questions ' . They are astounded when they learn that such matters form no part whatever of medical education, that they are avoided in medical schools with the same meticulous care as in girls' schools, and that the practitioner is launched into the world as uninformed of them as any layman." And, curiously enough, the greatest opposition to research into painless child-birth comes from the women doctors (with a few notable exceptions) themselves. The idea that sexual intercourse for all women is a sin and must be paid for by intense suffering at the birth of every child holds as good now, in the minds of many doctors, as it did in the Middle Ages. Let us hope that Russia, with these films and with these efforts to educate along constructive lines, will produce also scientists able to investigate this subject.

After the woman in child-birth, a baby is shown, and an interesting series of pictures follow showing the development to be expected of a child at different ages from three months to six years. His advance in the manner of washing himself is shown from the fat, one-year-old struggling with a toothbrush to the boy of six playing with a mechanical toy. As the average adult has seldom any idea of what may be expected from a child of different ages, this part of the film seemed most constructive and helpful. "

The picture ended with a group of children desiring a toy on a high shelf. One fetched a chair, another stood on it and finally reached it down; the beginning of the reasoning power of the brain.

It is very difficult to give in words the effect of this film. Things that seemed so clear in the pictures seem diffuse and confused put

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into sentences. Its value for students is immense, and yet it is so simple that anyone (having the sub-titles in their own language) could follow it.

Seeing the importance of the brain, it seems strange that such a film should have to wait so many years before being shown in England. And it is to be hoped that when it is finally screened it will be in an intact form, and not with the child-birth and other scenes cut out in deference to our alleged English susceptibility.

*Mechanics of the Brain* is an investigation into the processes of the mind as cold, as full of possibility and check, as a page from da Vinci's notebook.

Pudovkin's third film, *Mother*, is based upon a story by Maxim Gorki. It is said that the original scenario was submitted to Pabst, who refused it because he saw its possibilities and felt that such a film could be made only in Russia, unhampered by conventional or censorial considerations.

It is perhaps the great religious film of the world. I have seen it three times, and each time discovered some new depth of truth in it. It is like some lovely and electric Greek statue shining across the barbarous mists of the world.

How often the root of evil is a pre-conceived idea. It were easier, it seems, to look across the wastes of all Mongolia for a dinosaur egg than to discover impartial judgment in mankind. *Mother* is a Russian film, and therefore must incite to revolution and therefore must not be shown, there being apparently such "magic" in the word Russia, to the official mind, that all England on seeing the film would break windows, make a bonfire of doors and dash to the Home Office in the best Hollywood-revolution manner, just because the film is a Sovkino production instead of being under the lion trade mark of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

It is too ridiculous, too absurd. Would anyone throw away a lifetime of thought and training and rush down a street waving an iron club because he happened to see a different point of view from his own flashed on a screen for an hour? If it could happen we might live in a better, happier world, because we might learn then from watching tolerance and wisdom. We might even smash

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all censorship. But people do not learn from what they see or apprehend momentarily. A revolution (to repeat) is always a process of slow growth, never the flaring of a minute.

But, worse still, *Mother* is not red. It is not even particularly Russian. It is universal, which (they may say) is worse. For it deals with truth. But it was made by Russians in Russia and therefore may not be shown in England, except semi-privately, although anyone can watch it in Germany and Switzerland for a shilling and has suffered no harm, seemingly, in the process!

It is the story that has gone on in every savage tribe and in every civilization; the eternal story of human wisdom and beauty broken by tribal conventions and stupidity. It is the psychological tragedy of the world.

It is also the history, on a greater scale, of people and their attitude to this film. Some say, "We hear it is beautiful, we want to see it." Far more say, without a thought, "Oh, that dreadful Russian picture. Such things ought to be forbidden." And this particular conflict is also a portrait of that of the present time; the struggle between evolution into a greater civilization or the plunge back (more imminent when advance is possible than in a more stagnant period) into the darker ages of the world.

A drunk father, a son, a mother cleaning up the kitchen. You might find the same situation in a Sudanese hut, a New York tenement or a London slum. People may argue, but the father should not get drunk. But if lives become unbearably monotonous something is going to break somewhere. That is where education, up to the present, has failed. It offers repression instead of individual development. For the attitude of education and religion throughout centuries has been "pleasure is a sin" and "nothing that is not disagreeable of accomplishment is work." Therefore we have the kitchen in *Mother*, with the woman washing the clothes and the man getting drunk.

It is true that many leaders of education and religion have held an entirely opposite view. But their principles are entirely disregarded by their followers. Look at England. Boys are sent to school for ten years or longer at a cost to their parents of from fifty to three hundred pounds a year. They emerge at sixteen

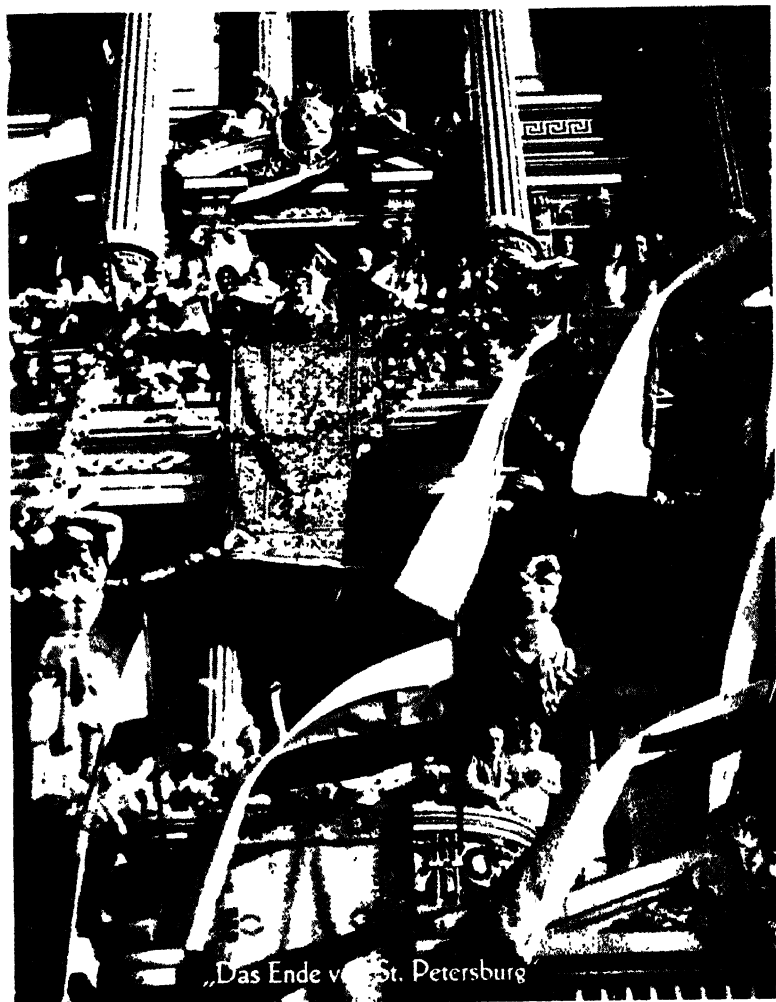




*Mother* visits her son in prison — An incident from Pudovkin's film of that name



The escape in *Mother*



...joyous air of carnival when Russia goes to war. From *The End of St. Petersburg*

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unable to read a book intelligently, ignorant of the names of the most common plants or animals, knowing nothing of geography, modern history, the most elementary economic principles, or of how to form an independent judgment. And with a profound contempt (deliberately taught them) for all boys outside their own narrow circle, whether this circle be that of the Public, secondary or elementary school. They are not only untrained for work, but they are utterly dependent on others for their amusements and in the same mental state as the father when he slouches into the village inn for a drink. Their attitude to their wives resembles his. A little sentimentality, some cruelty, the evasion of definite issues. In spite of the proved efficacy of vocational tests they are seldom given or the result disregarded. Yet half the trouble in the world to-day is caused by people being forced to work hours a day at jobs for which they are unfitted. It would be so easy to teach the use of modern appliances and the results of modern knowledge in school, but it would make life pleasanter and would involve new issues. Therefore nothing is done. Exactly as in *Mother*.

But the son (played by N. Batalof) is dissatisfied. He cannot accept his father's solution. He has attended meetings, it is in 1905, and in the middle of the night he hides arms for the strikers, under a board in the floor.

It happens to be arms. It might equally well (as far as the spirit is concerned) be a book, or a friend, or a desire to study some other trade; it is, at any rate, something of which his family does not approve, and his mother (V. Baranovskaya) watches him, feigning sleep.

A few drift over a hill to a meeting. Wind blows through grass. There may come a time when people will not be stupid.

The strike fails. The father, ranged against the strikers, is shot. The son is chased (and there is all the terror of pursuit in this sequence), but escapes. Coming back to his home, where his mother sits by his father's corpse, he is arrested.

But they can find nothing incriminating in his possession and let him go. Only for a few minutes. Another officer comes in. And his mother intercedes. He may go free, the officer says, if

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he will tell them where the arms are hidden. Naturally he is silent. But the mother remembers where she has seen him hide them. She lifts the board in the kitchen innocently, desiring only to save her son. As parents all over the world might condemn their children. It is better, they say, for X to be a doctor, though he hates it, than to look after sick animals which he loves, because a doctor can achieve a better position than a veterinary surgeon; it is nicer for Y to marry, though she may have no aptitude for housework, than for her to work in a shop and become independent. The mother believes the conventional world. (It is interesting to compare this scene with the father in *Two Days*; both deal with the same problem.) But the officer, instead of freeing the son, strikes him brutally in the face, and soldiers drag him away to prison.

The trial comes. One of the judges draws horses, all are bored. The defending lawyer hiccups; he is very nervous. And there is nothing to be said for a prisoner who has defied authority in such a manner. It would not be safe for the lawyer to be brilliant. The judges glance over the papers, up at the clock. Among the few people seated in the body of the court is a middle-aged woman, the personification of conventional morality. She puts up her eyeglass and her lips curl with the sadistic pleasure of seeing a human being legitimately—to her mind—tortured. The mother watches. The judge reads out the sentence. "Prison." And from the back of the court the mother shouts, in a world-wrecking plunge to essentials, "what is truth?"

Spring comes. The ice breaks. Great floes float downstream. The branches are thick with buds. The mother now is hiding pamphlets and working. But the son is in a small cell, very dark, with bars across the window.

Spring.

The men in the prison have nothing to do but think. They smell the stir of leaves outside. They remember ploughing and working. But there is nothing about them but walls; stone and dirt and silence.

The mother walks along the village path. Ducks waddle and children play in the mud. The snows have melted. The trees are

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coming out. Long buds shoot into the air. The mother stops to watch another woman feed her child.

The boy, in prison clothes too big for him, shuffles to the barrier to see his mother. She, now, has become a revolutionary. While she endeavours to slip a piece of paper into the son's hand, the guard watches a beetle trying to crawl out of a saucer of food. As the insect succeeds, the soldier squashes it, his mouth curling in a moron's grin. But the son has the paper in his fingers, and when he gets back to his cell reads on it that they will try to free him.

The next day, at exercise time, the boy is staring out from the tiny loophole in his cell at the sky. For punishment, the guard says, he shall not have his exercise in the yard—and it is the day they will attempt to free him.

Crowds march through the town.

The prisoners, marching round and round in the yard, turn. The few guards are quickly knocked down or killed, but the soldiers are arming in the city and from the walls of the prison, guards shoot at the escaping men.

The boy beats on the door till a guard comes. Somehow he knocks him down, escapes, others escape, they join the rush in the yard, but each time as they approach the wall, bullets thin their number. A few get away, including the boy. They race for the river edge. Bullets follow them.

Men run down lanes.

Bodies lie in the courtyard.

The cavalry ride out.

The son leaps on to a piece of ice. If he dies now he will at least have known liberty again for a moment. The river rushes past and he scrambles from ice crack to ice heap; out of the range of bullets.

The crowd marches back disconsolately: they have failed. The mother's face is inscrutable: she thinks of vengeance. At the bridge edge a figure crawls up the bank and runs towards them. He is lost in the throng; his mother pushes and is pushed forward. As they meet cavalry thunder across the bridge and rifle bullets mow down the people.

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Figures scatter. The boy falls, dead this time. But he and his mother have met and he has died on earth, under the free sky.

As she is cut down by a sabre her face fills the screen, screaming. But the Red Flag waves and will wave—and there is triumph in the ending rather than despair.

For an idea may be stronger than force, and may itself become force.

*Mother* was shown in London by the Film Society for one performance at the end of 1928. Curiously enough, the more conservative members of the audience (according to conventional rating) were the most enthusiastic. The so-called labor groups were, to a great extent, afraid of it. They thought it inflammatory and too strong, while the conservatives were saying magnificent and why is it not shown throughout England. But it is doubtful whether any spiritual revolution in England will come from the present labor groups. For these, at the moment, do not seem to be really interested in helping humanity. They have, most of them, an inferiority complex which is soothed by the hope of political power. Were they given that power it is questionable if they would attack fundamental issues (witness their avoidance of birth control), but would attempt rather to substitute themselves for the dispossessed classes. This was brought out during the war, for whereas there was a constructive effort made by the youth of the upper middle classes in 1912-1914 to break the tyranny of the public school and to discount tradition, these efforts were arrested by the war and the rebels killed within the first few months. But the boys who came along from families previously unfamiliar with these conditions, did not destroy, but re-established the tyranny of "what is done" on an even stronger basis. 1913 would have been more favourable to *Mother* than 1928.

Mr. Pabst once said: "Russia has taken one road and America has taken the opposite, but in a hundred years both will meet. England will take neither, but will work out her own salvation independently, and in the end she will arrive at the same result."

And this was a true and a profound statement. England trying a French or a Russian revolution would get into an appalling mess. The rest of Europe would enjoy themselves thoroughly

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and a good half of the country, from peasant to merchant, would pretend nothing had happened. Probably a lot of people would get killed, but hostilities would stop at the most critical moment lest they disturbed the pigeons at St. Paul's or because the Lost Dogs' Home was out of meat, and really, one could not feed them revolutionaries, could one! We have simply not the temperament for that mode of adjustment. On the other hand, we are rapidly arriving at the point when a small minority, utterly out of touch with conditions of to-day, control what we shall read, see, say and do. You may not see *Ten Days* because it might incite children to revolution. But there are over five hundred schools on the Black List to-day where hundreds of children sit in insanitary school-rooms. (See the weekly issue of *The Times Educational Supplement*.) A committee on the teaching of hygiene stated that it would be unwise to supply their booklets to many schools, as either no running water was laid on or a single towel and piece of soap was allotted for indiscriminate use by all the scholars. Perhaps this is logical; we teach revolution through our own neglect and then will not allow them to see the triumphant result of protest. And lest it be thought that the care is given entirely to the rich, it is a well-known fact that if sanitary inspection were enforced, few of the public schools would come up to standard, and the death rate from preventible causes is high in them. Also, at a lecture given on the Dalton plan a couple of years ago, ninety out of the hundred present had come from elementary schools at their own expense, and one or two had gone without dinner to attend it, of the remaining ten, one or two were from secondary schools, and the rest were parents or those interested in education. Not a single teacher from the public schools was present. Discussing this point later with a schoolmaster, I was told that it was not possible to be interested in modern developments in education and keep a job at any but one or two of the big schools. So with all classes so neglected it is perhaps not surprising that the English put up with barriers to the freedom of their intelligence that would not be endured abroad. But the conflict between progress and tradition grows yearly more acute and our virtues of good temper and tolerance are suffering in the process.

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It is hard to watch the position of England decay each year. For there is magnificent material in the country that is constantly wasted or badly used. And it could occupy a definite place in the evolution of the new world. America has produced a high standard of living and education, but unfortunately her schools are run upon traditional lines and have little relationship with life. The result is a constant surging between complete restriction and complete license once school is left. (Probably no law in history has caused such havoc as prohibition.) So that America, faced with grave decisions, is uncertain and possibly retrogressive. Russia has intellectual leadership and an uneducated peasantry, a situation that may be duplicated in the East but not in the West. And England might become the balance between the two continents—if it would only scrap its prehistoric educational system and think instead of repeating platitudes.

A boy eager for progression, a family anxious for him to keep safely in the old ways, definite opposition from authority (what about the old motor rule that a car must be preceded by a man bearing a red flag?), finally imprisonment and death. Forget about Russia and remember that *Mother* fundamentally is the story of many English homes, with disease or stagnation, or the Colonies as a substitute for the ending.

Pudovkin's third film, *The End of St. Petersburg*, was first shown in Germany by Derussa, in the spring of 1928. The manuscript was by Natan Zarchi; S. Kolopski was the architect, and W. Golovnia (who photographed Pudovkin's other films) was in charge of the camera. M. Doller was assistant director and it was a Meshrabpom-Russ production, and very popular in Russia.

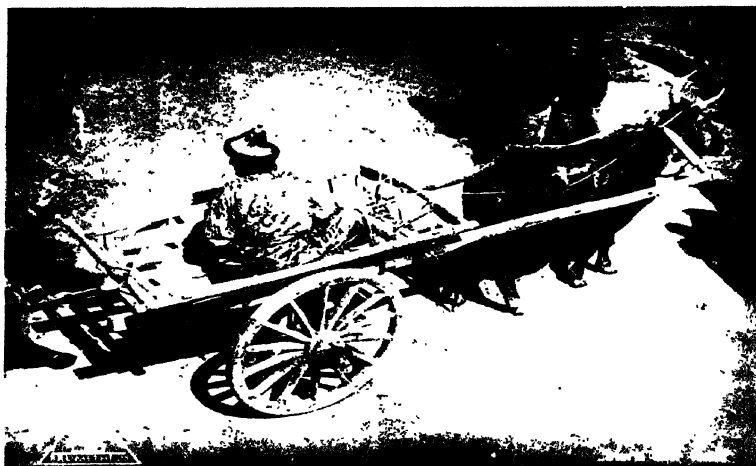
Germany received the film with unmeasured enthusiasm. Actually I saw it twice, by courtesy of Derussa, as we arrived after the Berlin run of the picture was over. But it was shown again last autumn and it was possible to see it throughout Germany, at prices ranging roughly from one and six to five shillings a seat.

It is an attempt to show not only the story of the war years from 1914 to the Revolution, as they affected everyone, but also how these events affected the development of a peasant from his





The peasant hero of *The End of St. Petersburg*, played by J. Chuvelet.



From Pe

Isa A Mongolian peasant cart



Bair (left) brings his fox fur to the town to sell. *Storm Over Asia*

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ignorant youth in a small village to becoming an intelligent worker in the new era.

A man is working in the fields.

A woman goes to fetch water, her pail drops, she staggers towards the steps, and crawls animal fashion towards the bed. Her smallest child, frightened, trots across the rough stubble towards the father: "Come, quickly, mother is dying," it cries, not realising that yet another baby is being born. There is not enough food. So the eldest son must seek work in the city.

He arrives (I. Chuvelef) in St. Petersburg. Together with another worker he struggles along the platform, hair in his eyes, looking like an Eskimo, utterly bewildered. They cross the square, two black dots on the horizon seen between the giant legs of statues. He arrives at last in the workmen's quarter of the town.

But conditions are becoming impossible in the big works belonging to Lebedeff (W. Obolensky), the rich manufacturer. The men are over-worked and badly treated. He is preparing an advance order of munitions for the Government and orders longer hours to be worked. One man (A. Chistiakoff) organises a strike. Returning home from work he finds the peasant sitting in his home—they are from the same village. The peasant has been unable to find either work or a lodging.

But the workman's wife (V. Baranovskaya) dreads a strike. Both her small children are hungry. She is resentful, both of the meeting of the strikers held there, and of the peasant, who is allowed to sleep in a corner.

Next morning most of Lebedeff's workers are out on strike. But there are plenty of unemployed in the town. The peasant joins the ranks of those recruited to fill the strikers' places. But there is trouble at the gates and they are not allowed to enter by the strike leaders.

Lebedeff and some officers drive up in cars. In utter ignorance of what he is doing, the peasant betrays his friend. He shows the officers where the strike leader lives and the man is arrested. Lebedeff gives the peasant a small coin and promise of work.

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The peasant wanders through Petrograd and it dawns gradually on his undeveloped intelligence what he has done. He passes food stalls and smells the food wistfully, but he does not spend the coin. Meantime, the worker's wife has been unable to get bread for her children. Her husband is in prison. The peasant comes slowly down the stairs into her bare room and puts the coin on the table. She gets up angrily, they do not speak, but the peasant's eyes are beginning to turn from sub-normal to human. He goes out up the stairs. She follows and throws the coin after him.

He has forgotten his cap. The woman looks at it, and picks it up. As he crosses the yard she rushes up with it and hands it back, without a word, not yet willing to forgive, but beginning to understand.

Next day the peasant forces his way into Lebedeff's office and demands the release of his fellow-villager. It is refused. He smashes up the office and shakes Lebedeff like a terrier before he is over-powered, beaten and flung into prison.

1914. War.

In no other film has war hysteria been portrayed so devastatingly and so well. Guns are hung with flowers. Girls drop flowers on soldiers. Old men wave hats, women smile. It is a great, joyous festival. In the prison the cell doors are opened. A little thief, sensing his opportunity, begs to be allowed to volunteer. He, the hero, is given the flag to carry. The peasant, blinking at the sudden light, is forced into the ranks behind. They march out towards war. And they and the soldiers and the volunteers and the guns are hidden under flowers, and the tramp of their feet is not heard for laughter and cheers.

(Just as it happened in London, in 1914.)

War goes on. Lebedeff is making money in munitions. Scenes of him in the crowded Stock Exchange cross cut with men struggling between barbed wire.

A body disappears in mud. Here are corpses. German or Russian? Only the mud can tell. Limbs rot away. Shells burst, men drown in flooded trenches. Pudovkin himself, it will be remembered, volunteered and fought for many months before he was taken prisoner. There has never been anything comparable to

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this as a record of war. And between shots all the time, life is shown as it goes on, in St. Petersburg.

Lebedeff in his car—a drowning man.

Men lift bowler hats and bargain; shells burst near frozen, frightened soldiers, and cold liquid mud trickles over their heavily plastered coats.

Food grows scarcer—the men in the dug-outs wonder “what are we fighting for?”

It is the workman's wife now who is organising the women. There is no bread. The children are hungry.

Kerensky emerges with a flower in his hand, and the first revolution. Over an elaborately laid dinner table a woman faints in hysteria because Kerensky speaks. Men on the front are still caught in barbed wire.

There is still no bread.

They come to arrest the workman again, but he has gone out to fetch cigarettes. They see his cup on the table, and his wife watches them. As she hears her husband's footsteps she flings the cup through the window and another victim is saved.

The workman goes out to the troops, encamped beyond the city. As he is addressing them, Kerensky arrives in his car. He endeavours to have the workman arrested and shot, but the peasant, become a leader among the soldiers, welcomes his friend and urges the men to help their comrades in Petrograd. Kerensky dashes away in his car.

The attack on the Winter Palace begins. When light comes, at dawn, the wife goes through the courtyard slowly, with a small pail of potatoes, in search of her husband. She sees a body and starts in fear, but it is not her husband. He is alive and further on, the guard assures her. On her way they call her to help with a badly wounded soldier. The men are hungry. They look at the potatoes, and she shares some out. There are only a couple left when she sees the peasant lying wounded against the parapet. She hands him the last and comes empty-handed to her husband. But he is alive, and with the night a new era has arisen and St. Petersburg has become—Leningrad.

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Pudovkin himself has stated that he wished to illustrate an epoch in this film, the overthrow of the Tzarist regime by the World War and the Revolution. Scene after scene was scrapped if the acting seemed theatrical, and as far as possible people were used who had not, before been filmed. Chuvelef was an accountant and appeared previously only in a few shots in *Mother*. The men in the crowds were workers and soldiers. And, Pudovkin added, he wanted the spectator to recognise the hero of the film in every Russian and in every German soldier.

The cumulative effect upon the spectator of the scenes of hysteria upon the outbreak of war, followed by the trenches and Lebedeff sequence cross cutting with each other, cannot be described. Pudovkin is vehement, personal, the Euripides of the screen, where Eisenstein is the Aeschylus. Where injustice has burnt him, he cannot let his anger go. He is at his best with storm, following an emotion, losing his visual sense in a hurricane till everything but the bones of the incident are swept away in the wind. And this process of the rending of all but the skeleton happens on the screen. War is this and child-birth is that, and not flowers and pretty messages and fine words. But there is hope, there is construction. Experience makes of the peasant a leader, and a city may change its heart as well as its name.

It would be interesting to know more of Pudovkin's youth and what particular incidents awoke this passion against injustice. Probably much came from his own experience; the transition from being a student in chemistry at a university to fighting on the Russian front must have been abrupt and terrible. It was the scholars on the English side who felt not only the war, but the monotony of army life and discipline the most. And, again, much was probably the result of incidents watched in early childhood.

One slight comment : I did not myself care so much for the short sequence at the end of the film where Kerensky addresses the army. It serves to re-introduce the workman and the peasant, but I felt it to be not quite so intense and realistic as the rest of the film. Others, however, admire it. And it is but one moment from a film which, as a whole, is one of the greatest that has been

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made. It is Eisenstein's treatment of Kerensky in *Ten Days* that spoils one for any other rendering of this incident.

*The End of St. Petersburg* has been shown with great success in New York and in parts of America, but in a cut version. I have not been able to find out exactly what parts were omitted. It has also been shown by various film societies in several different countries in Europe, including the London Film Society. I can see myself no reason why it should not be universally shown. It shows war as it is, but as we speak continually of our desire for peace we cannot logically refuse it on these grounds. And it is a film of great beauty, dignity and cinematic interest. It is banned because it is a serious work of art, instead of a mob-and-wolf studio fabrication. Knowing this does not make the insult to one's intelligence easier to bear. Why are we, who have boasted of the liberty of England throughout Europe, denied the intellectual freedom of the Continent?

*Storm Over Asia.* They asked us if we would see the Russian version with Russian sub-titles, but added, doubtfully, when we said yes, "it is anti-English."

They used to say in the near East, "an Englishman's word is as good as his bond." They used to say across Europe that an Englishman was mad, but that he had a sense of justice. So positive a statement has usually some foundation of fact. And though the war jolted into consciousness that the English were not nearly so impartial as they were made out to be, still there remains a tradition of seeing both sides, and it always comes as a slight shock, the realisation that we have lost the one reputation abroad. of which we might well have been proud.

Mongolia. Marco Polo. I could not be parted from his travels, I remember, when I read them first; I was ten, I think, somewhere along the white hot dusty banks of the Loire. Giant roots of ginger, the right to commandeer horses upon the mere holding up of the gerfalcon tablet, rough wild Tartars living on their mares—I liked them so much better at that age than the studious Chinese. I always came back to them, after the other travels. Genghis

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Khan, riding towards Europe; to all the wide sweep of Asia from Tibet to Tartary and the little spice islands scattered from China to Ceylon.

Later, there were other books. On Tibet chiefly. On the search for treasure—dinosaur eggs and seeds. Kingdon Ward and Chapman Andrews. The account of a woman who went to Lhasa. Lissus, rope bridges and primitive hill dwelling tribes.

I knew the geography if I had never been to Mongolia.

It began—perfectly—with cloud, wide sky, short grass and small round huts.

Bair, a young hunter, crawls on the mountain side and shoots with great difficulty an arctic fox. The fur is very valuable. (Bair is played by Inkischinof, said to be himself a Mongolian film director.) He wishes to sell it for a high price to obtain help for his invalid mother. Men have come to the tent on their way to market. Children peep at the strangers and scramble back to their skin bed. A priest chants. Bair fingers the fox skin and looks at his mother. The priest wishes to take the skin as payment, but Bair snatches it from him and in the scuffle an amulet drops to the ground. Bair is scolded by his parents for his having dared to dispute with the priest, but as he leaves the tent his mother hangs the amulet round his neck.

Men ride into the fur market. The crowd scenes are magnificent and must have been very difficult to photograph. It is interesting to watch the different types and nationalities in this sequence. One would like to see the film over and over from merely the ethnographical point of view.

Fur merchants, American and European, watch the market. Spies come with word of any choice skins that may be brought in. They hurry with news of Bair. Presently all are collected in the big fur hall.

They pay only a little for skins that have taken months to collect. The chief trader picks up the fox skin and throws Bair a few coppers. Bair flings them back furiously and tries to take up his skin. In the fight that follows he wounds the trader, and money, furs and natives scatter in all directions.



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Bair turns for the hills and runs into the midst of a troop of insurgents fighting the foreign troops stationed in the country. A lovely sequence follows of a running fight across an uphill rocky country, full of tall trees, stones and tiny ravines. Bair aids one of the rebels, and arriving at the top of the pass is given a lift on one of their horses. At the gathering place he discovers by the fireside that the young soldier is a woman—with a baby. His face is at first incredulous, and then he bursts into shouts of laughter. He becomes one of the band. But that same night its leader dies from wounds received in the fight. This is a perfect reconstruction of the primitive reaction to death. Each soldier stays with him a moment and then waits a little way off. Alone, he and a great tree die together.

Up to this moment the film has been a perfect whole. It is not only the chronicle of the life of any Mongolian hunter, but a record of the life of a hunting, non-agricultural people.

The section following is as great, but it seems almost like a second story. A great ceremony with religious dances is planned by the lamas in honour of the foreigners. The General (L. Dedinzeff) is shown dressing for the occasion. He takes his bath, is massaged, his uniform is over-brushed and his boots more than cleaned. In an adjoining room his wife (L. Billinskaya) has her hair waved, puts on jewels. Cutting across these scenes are shots of the ceremonial dressing of the religious dancers, the adjustment of head-dresses and masks. The General, his wife, and some officers get into cars and plunge out through the mud. The wheels shake over the ridges till the engine, it seems, must drop in pieces. They arrive at last in front of the lamaserie.

The ceremonial dances of Mongolia have never been recorded in a film before, and very few travellers have been permitted to see them. Drums and long trumpets mingle with fantastic head-dresses and masks. (If an Englishman had brought this record back, all the schoolchildren possible would be taken to see it by empire and educational leagues and societies.) But it is all ritual and ceremony, the dancers do not really believe, and they are tired, blowing trumpets, beating drums. Yet superstition forbids them to stop.

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The General, his wife and the officers advance up the long courtyard, tiny figures in the midst of figures. It is symbolic of so many useless observances. They exchange the requisite presents, pin on orders. It is all very correct. Great Power bowing to Great Power. They walk slowly into the hall, lined with Chinese, with Lamas, with Mongolians, all watching, but pretending not to watch. The sensation of heat and incense becomes overpowering.

Cross cutting with the ceremony are shots of the foreign troops riding to surprise a Mongolian village. The men, warned, escape, but the herds are captured. On their return, however, the Mongolian surprise them in a narrow valley. A few survivors, with a prisoner, get through to the safety of the camp.

Prayers—soldiers riding.

Incense and drums beating. Frightened sheep, a man dying.

The General and his wife come to the centre of the festival, to a child of three wrapped in silk, sitting on a mat. The incarnation of Buddha or an early saint. One toe rubs against the other in a moment's play. Then the child is as silent as the watchers. And both the General and his wife, having a sentimental love of children, pity. Pity the child because it is there, denied play and denied air, and pity because it is said that these children usually die young—conditions of life, or so that they shall not wield political power. The lamas watch. The General salutes. It is easy to recognise authority based on the same foundation as one's own.

A soldier bursts into the midst of this, frightened and breathless. He is held back. Ceremonies must not be disturbed. An officer slips over to him, comes back and whispers. The General smiles. It is a joke. He congratulates the lamas, through the interpreter, on the ceremony. And excuses the interruption. The man—unlearned—knew no better. The Chinese watch. They know something has happened. But the General is as inscrutable as the Chinese.

And here, it seems, Pudovkin has been more than fair. He might have made the General out a coward or a bully. He has done neither. He has shown him meeting defeat and a very serious

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position—they are alone, a handful, among thousands of potential enemies—and he remains calm and immovable as the faces about him, with courage enough to go through the ceremony as if nothing had happened. As a matter of fact, the General is the victim of a system of education that discounts vision. Military discipline does not permit thought. And he would be as intolerant of an Englishman who did not share his views as of any fur-hunting native. But as he is presented here he keeps dignity and is not an exaggerated type.

The cars turn toward the camp. Now they are away they can look at each other and discuss the seriousness of the position. Horses appear on the horizon—their own men or rebels? The General takes out his revolver, his wife bursts into tears (she has probably dreaded this moment for months), but it is their soldiers that ride up, come to the rescue.

At the camp Bair is tied, a prisoner. "Shoot him," the General says, and goes on to a council. An officer goes into the soldiers' quarters. The men lie there, bored, resentful of the mud, reading old papers. Orders are whispered. A man, hating the job, gets into his uniform. What a different treatment this is of the opposite side, from that which is given to rebels in films which present the anti-revolution point of view. The soldiers are represented as human beings; not as idiots or brutes. The soldier prods Bair in front of him and they wade through the mud and slime out towards open country. When they get to the hills he offers the Mongolian a cigarette. But Bair's hands are tied and he does not smoke. Instead, he smiles. Angry that he should have made the gesture and loathing the job, but without courage enough to refuse to carry out orders, the soldier orders Bair to walk on. The Mongolian, not understanding, moves on, smiling. The soldier fires and fires again, with unsure aim, until at last Bair drops, rolling over and over, down the precipice.

At the council they have turned Bair's things over and found the amulet. It contains a paper stating that he is the direct descendant of Genghis Khan. An idea strikes them. They could set him up as king, under their influence, to counteract the revolt.

But they have ordered him to be shot.

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Officers rush out; they meet the soldier. Perhaps Bair is not dead. They struggle down the precipice and drag him up, an indistinguishable lump of mud.

Doctors work over him. Not a detail is omitted. Blood, unbandaged wounds, an operation. It is as complete as the scientific record of *Mechanics of the Brain*. And Bair lives.

A bundle of silk robes and bandages, he is set on the Mongolian throne. Foreign women come in, well meaning, but vulgar in their curiosity. He is such a king. (But they took no notice of the young Mongolian in the market.) They sit—and smile—and stare. And lest it should be said that this is exaggerated, I have myself seen women behave as foolishly in the Near East. They seem to lose all sense of proportion, when it comes to the question of a chief. Even if it is a chief of a dozen mud huts and fifty inhabitants. Naturally, not all English people behave in this manner, mercifully only a few of them. But as it is a joke among ourselves, do not let us reproach this bit of the film at least for being anti-English.

Bair says nothing, notices nothing. He sits there as if dead, with his eyes fixed on a bowl of goldfish. Left at last for a moment he struggles to the table, to pull off the cloth, to lie with the water from the broken bowl streaming over him, to reach towards freedom, freedom. . .

A reception is prepared in his honor. The General's daughter meets her fiancé. He has brought her a present, a fur, Bair's own fox fur. And Bair puts his hand on it. He begins to remember.

Shortly afterwards a young Mongolian, trying to escape, is shot in front of him, brutally.

Bair goes mad. (The impression given by these scenes between the rescue of Bair from the ravine and this moment is that he was in a state almost of amnesia. The fur, and finally the shock of seeing the man killed, in the way he had been shot, in front of him, brought back his full memory.) He flings the silk from his shoulders and snatches a sword. He throws chairs over. In the darkness soldiers stumble over each other, furniture crashes. Bair leaps from the window and rides off to the steppes. And in a

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symbolic storm of sand, and Tartars riding, and the General and his soldiers being blown over and over, the film ends.

And this, according to a recent English criticism in a well-known newspaper, is "a little ridiculous."

Yet, having seen the film, I cannot see why they called it anti-English. I cannot see why it could not be shown freely and fully in London, without cuts or revisions, to soothe our supposedly so susceptible minds.

For what does it say in essence but this. Any force of foreign troops in a strange land is bound to be resented by the inhabitants. There are bound to be uprisings. And those risings are going to be put down by force. And force means cruelty.

Does any Englishman suppose it is possible to maintain an army in a foreign country without force? And war is not a game, and I myself could never understand the people in the war who cried out about air-raids and attacks on civilians. Either you have war or you have peace. If you have war, there seems to be no logical difference between setting a man to kill someone he has never seen or dropping a bomb on a town. It is not a game with rules—it is war. And as long as people are uneducated there will always be the risk of battles. Only we shall have to find a new word for education, for I do not mean by the term someone who has learnt a number of books by heart—I have known so many people, for instance, who have passed through universities with honor but yet have remained completely uneducated. It is rather an equal balance of development, to attain to equal sense of body and of mind, not of one of these to the exclusion of the other, as is the case usually at present.

I think that imperialism in its time achieved a great deal of good. The trouble is that the world has outgrown imperialism, but the upholders of it, who would lose their positions by its destruction, refuse to acknowledge the fact. It is like a father and son. A father will brave any danger to protect his child, but will sacrifice that child's ultimate happiness willingly rather than permit him to follow a trade of which he, the father, does not approve. We have all, in our experience, known cases of the sort.

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The incursion of Europe into Asia from the eighteenth century to the present day undoubtedly paved the way for the modernization of the East. And this was an excellent thing. For conditions in the East are deplorable. People say that the East is romantic. I could never imagine why. It is powerful and interesting and full of a non-Western wisdom. But it is also full of dirt and disease, and terror and injustice. I think no one who has ridden into the desert at dusk will forget the experience, nor the way gazelles scatter on the horizon, like a mirage that disperses, nor camel and young camel edging their way between egg' pile and scarlet saddles; but neither will one forget the childrens' faces, black with flies, the ignorant, beaten women, the smallpox and the superstition.

Where we have failed in England, and lamentably failed, is in our lack of provision of educational facilities for the natives. Now this is not a "red" statement. I read it almost weekly in the pages of *The Times Educational Supplement*. We have supported native autocracy and countenanced its endurance of a class of serfs. We have made no real attempt to introduce compulsory education into India nor those parts of Africa that are under British rule. We have made some half-hearted attempts to improve the position of women, but we have never had courage enough to put an end to the merciless exploitation of women and children in the East. It may be argued that had we done so, we should have lost India. To which it may be answered, that it were better to have lost it fighting for an idea that the world might respect, than to lose it because native autocracy breaks and the serfs pour over the land, remembering only centuries of oppression.

A great number of Englishmen have gone out to the East and worked there without thought of personal safety. They have built roads and hospitals and given time and consideration to the natives' needs. And they have usually come up against exactly the same sort of rigid narrow-minded English official that Pudovkin has portrayed in the General. Look at Burton's struggle with authority when he would go wandering as an Arab into Sindh. And what does Doughty say on the matter in Arabia Deserta. "At first I had asked of the Waly, Governor of Syria, his license

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to accompany the Haj caravan to the distance of Medzin Salih. The Waly then privately questioned the British Consulate, an office which is of much regard in these countries. The Consul answered that his was no charge in any such matter; he had as much regard of me, would I take such dangerous ways, as of his old hat. This was a man that, in time past, had proffered to show me a good turn in my travels, who now told me it was his duty to take no cognisance of my Arabian journey, lest he might hear any word of blame, if I miscarried."

Unhappily, the arrogant attitude of the General is more obvious and more often remembered than the efforts of a dozen Englishmen eager to give help. I remember an English officer saying to me in the Near East: "Don't speak gently to these niggers, they don't understand it. When you speak to them, give an order." And I deeply regretted my inability to knock him down. Yet at the same time another Englishman said: "There is no difference between an intelligent Oriental and an intelligent Englishman." But the officer would do more harm in six months than the other man had accomplished good in years of study of, and friendship with, the natives.

So do let us forget the ostrich trick of burying our head in the sand. And let us face the unpleasant truth that our stay in the East depends entirely upon the type of men we send out there and the ideas they try to apply. Pudovkin himself has said, lecturing in Berlin, that the really artistic film producer must either love or hate, and that Dickens, whom nobody would accuse of being a Bolshevik, always made his heroes poor and the officials unpleasant characters. But I see no reason to drag Dickens into the discussion. I do not think the English as portrayed in *Storm Over Asia* are exaggerated. I do think, however, they are rare, and that many hundreds of Englishmen have done work in the East which has prepared the way for its forthcoming development.

*Storm Over Asia* provoked storm in Berlin. Newspapers forgot their politics and united in praising it as a work of art. Police were called out to control the crowds trying to get tickets. Performances were sold out days beforehand. Pudovkin gave lectures, in which he pleaded for the liberty of the artist, and went to

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Amsterdam to address the Film Liga there. It is to be hoped that the film eventually will be shown in London.

Pudovkin has written several books on the cinema, of which one has been translated into German, under the title of *Film Regie und Film Manuscript*, published by Verlag Lichtbildbuhne at five marks (five shillings). It was rumored a translation was coming out in England. He also wrote, in conjunction with Eisenstein and Alexandroff, an article on Sound Films, which was published in *Close Up*, October, 1928. He has also just finished acting the chief part in *The Living Corpse*, directed by F. Ozep.

It is difficult to speak of his work as a whole, for it is still in process of evolution. His films are lyrical, impulsive and turbulent always. No one has understood war better nor treated it more truthfully. It is interesting to wonder what his next film will be: all those he has made have been so different from one another. His task will be difficult after *Storm Over Asia*, but no doubt a new surprise will emerge from some totally other direction.





Inke Schmitt, who plays the part of Bar, the Mongolian tur-tuker  
in *Storm Over Tibet*



One of the participants in the Lama sacred festival, photographed  
for the first time in *Storm Over Tibet*



From *The Death Ship*, by Alexander Ro

## CHAPTER V.

### ALEXANDER ROOM.

Alexander Room was born in Vilna, an important commercial town in western Russia, now become a part of Poland. He attended the Gymnasium there until he had finished his education. He then went to Moscow, where he became a journalist, and was also for a time assistant at a small theatre. He studied in Kuleshof's school and began cinema work about five years ago. He has made three films to date, *The Death Ship*, *Bed and Sofa*, and *The Pits*.

Two qualities are apparent in his work: one of them is his overwhelming interest in sociology, and the other is his desire to portray mental states to the exclusion of extraneous matter. Nothing, for instance, will be introduced to suggest atmosphere (as, for example, the two figures in *The End of St. Petersburg* seen through the giant legs of the great statue), but external objects are emphasized only when they become important to the people with whom he is dealing and in that exact moment of their mental consciousness, as when the woman in *Bed and Sofa* picks up the cat's head, which she had seen day in and day out for months, but had not noticed with her inner mind until the moment it became part of her struggle to decide whether to leave her husband or not. Room studied the work of Freud and other modern psychologists for years, and the result of such study is apparent in his work. He is the most modern in outlook, perhaps, of Russian directors, for social problems dominate him, sometimes to his disadvantage. One would know that his interests, for instance, would be journalism and literature were the cinema not invented, just as one would surmise that Pudovkin would be

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interested in painting. Room is particularly notable in his handling of male psychology; one feels he has known and studied men more than women. And that is the defect of his method. He has studied the psychology of ordinary life so well and has photographed it so accurately that where his perception has failed the defect is far more glaring than it would be in the work of a man who showed rather what he himself would see, than what would be seen by the person in the film.

Eighteen months ago all Germany talked of *Bed and Sofa*. It became tiresome in any cinematic discussion to be silenced with, "But you don't know, you can't judge, you haven't seen *Bed and Sofa*." For at the time one was barely conscious of the cinematographic existence of Russia, except that Eisenstein had made *Potemkin*. And, of course, at that moment the general release of the picture in the Berlin kinos had ended. I remember we drove through the rain and between streets of tall, compact modern buildings out into a far suburb of Berlin, hearing that the film was showing there in a tiny kino, only to find on arrival that the time had been changed and we could not see it. Finally (as we were leaving Germany) we discovered it at Hamburg.

We sat first through one of the dreariest films it has been my misfortune to see. Perhaps even the projectionist was bored. At any rate, the reels hopped through the machine so quickly that people moved by clockwork instead of walking! A complicated, old-fashioned plot added threads to itself that experience of bad films told one would have to be unravelled in appropriate movie manner. And all the time there was the thought "this is the last day, and suppose there is no showing of *Bed and Sofa* after all."

Finally the film ended, lights went up, girls munched chocolates, old ladies dropped wet umbrellas and wiped their spectacles. "We read again in our programme that Room's film was a study of modern Russia. And at last the kino darkened and a title flashed on the screen; *Bett und Sofa*."

It opens in a room: a quite familiar room, not completely of the slums, but too crowded with things to be comfortable. Moscow, we are reminded, suffers from a housing shortage. A

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husband and wife are in bed together. It is morning. A cat stirs them. The husband (N. Batalof) snatches it up, he is young but settled, seeing his wife now as something stable like the chair, not as something alive and full of movement like the animal. And the wife (played by Ludmila Semenova) is aware of this. She is brooding and resentful. Bored with the constant nagging succession of household duties, cooking in the tiny room, keeping it clean when so encumbered and having nowhere to put her clothes. Hundreds of daily trifles that prickle like pins. The husband rushes out to his work on a building high above Moscow. There are trams in the distance and a sense of work and space.

A printer (V. Fogel) sits on a train coming towards Moscow. His bundle of belongings is beside him. Work is easily got, they say, but they cannot give him a room. But he is in the city, and until he gets tired and his bundle heavy, he wanders about, asking for a room without result, but examining everything with interest. Suddenly he and the husband meet; they used to know each other. "No room, but we have a sofa," the husband says. So there are to be three now in the tiny room that has scarcely been wide enough for himself, his wife and the cat.

The wife is surprised and resentful. It is bad enough to have to clean and cook for another man, but besides, the husband has shown so obviously that he does not value their relationship by thus breaking into their privacy. The printer realises this and in little subtle ways, by helping in the room, by small gifts, tries to make up for the trouble he has caused.

The husband is called away. The friend wishes to leave. But the husband insists he must stay. The inevitable happens and after a lovely shot that gave all the movement of the air, waving grass under aeroplane wings (they take a flight round Moscow), the wife and friend become lovers.

Life is new again and exciting. Until the husband suddenly returns with a huge basket of berries. His wife (owing to his absence) has again become alive for him. They do not know what to do, how to tell him; finally he understands and goes out himself through Moscow seeking for a place to sleep.

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But there is no place. It rains. He goes back for his coat and clothes. The wife, upset by the two emotions, old habit, new love, points to the sofa. After all, there is no room in Moscow. And it is raining and stormy. He puts his things away. There are three again in the room.

The men resume their old friendship, though in both there is a curious antagonism. They play chess; while the wife watches at the window, all nerves, suddenly startled by the sudden light of a car. The evening drags on. No one wants to be the first to suggest bed.

The husband goes to buy some food. On his return the others are in the bed together and the sofa is ready for him. He shrugs his shoulders, goes to sleep. After all, he has a roof over his head and it is raining outside.

Days pass: the situation is too tense to go on long. The wife is ill, realises she is going to have a child. Whose? They scratch their heads. Abortion is legal under certain conditions in Russia. The wife takes the necessary papers to the hospital.

And here Room fails.

Up to this moment the film has been magnificent. It has been true to what happens in hundreds of families. For it is merely the housing shortage that confines the action to one room. Psychologically the situation happens in hundreds of English homes. The husband grows to regard the wife as something to be always there, like the house. Someone else comes along who sees the woman as a human being. Sometimes this leads to divorce, sometimes to intrigue. Oftener to half an intrigue which ends in the two men developing a violent friendship for each other to the exclusion of the woman. The only difference between the Russian film and what happens over and over again in other countries is that the three are not confined to the same bedroom.

But there is a break, a concession to popular ideas, in the finish of the film. The wife arrives at the hospital, looks out of the window, sees a child playing with a doll, rushes out, and is shown going towards the country in a train. She is going to have the child. And that is just what that kind of woman in that kind of



*Nico's Batalof in Bed and Sofa*



Ludmila Semenova in *Bed and Sofa*



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circumstance would not have done. She would not have wanted a child born of such tangled, 'resentful' happenings, for the child's own sake. The passive neglect and ignoring of all her feelings by the husband led to the circumstance: probably the solution would have been to have left Moscow with the other man. The maternal instinct of the woman had led her to re-admit the husband. No, circumstances were too involved for her to have had the baby.

But Room, as may be seen in a later film, *The Pits*, is much concerned with this problem of husband, wife and child.

*Bed and Sofa* ends with the two men coming back to the empty room; they look at each other and scratch their heads. And Room somehow conveys in their glances that they are really wondering, not how the woman is getting on or whether she has money, but who will wash and cook for them.

Even with the jar at the end, this must remain one of the great films of the world. It obliterates so many trials, experiments and ifs. There is no further need to talk about what the cinema might do. Here is accomplishment. It gives to the spectator instead of taking from him: a novel sensation to those used to the ordinarily projected films. Room has obtained his effects by using the correct psychological basis for all actions, however minute, and by his capacity to set symbols of the brain processes, in pictures. He gives moods, too, with alternating space and confinement: the husband running down the building, the wife waiting at the window.

*Bed and Sofa* has been successfully shown throughout Russia. It ran in ordinary cinemas throughout Germany for months. In France it has been shown at the Studio 28 and privately. The censor there, however, insisted upon its being called *Trois Dans Un Sous-sol* (*Three in a Basement*). It has been forbidden in Holland. It is among the chief events of the London Film Society's programme for 1929.

Room's first film, *The Death Ship* (*Der Todesbarke*), is quite different in texture, though it has many of his characteristics. Even if one did not know, one would judge it to be an early

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attempt, for it has a curious authentic boy-adventure-book quality and one of the best portrayals of a small boy I have seen in films. How good Russians are with children. They show them as they are and not as adults would have them be. The little girl in *His Son*, standing by the baby's coffin, puzzled and frightened, with her completely hurt, bewildered indignation when the old woman strikes her hand from the dead body; the smug, preening, image-of-her-mother girl in *Das Dorf*, and the boy in this film, romantic, mischievous, frightened and courageous in the same five minutes, these are real children, individual children, as we ourselves (if we have been willing to see) have known them. Compare them with the dressed up puppets trotting through English or American films, all curls, kisses and deliberate plot to do the thing that will please grown-up people and win most admiration.

*The Death Ship* has been generally released throughout Germany. I have not traced it in Switzerland. It has probably been shown in France. I saw it in Berlin by courtesy of Prometheus, who control the German release.

It is the story of the struggle between the Reds and the Whites on the shores of the Black Sea. But it is not a propaganda film: the story merely demands two rival factions and could equally well apply to any other historical period, Cromwell and the Royalists, for instance. There is no reason why it should not be shown in England, where it would probably prove most popular with the young. They like adventure stories, and it is certainly better to show them an adventure that has a basis in reality than a film of pirates performing impossible feats.

Perhaps the first thing that startles one about the picture is the authentic quality of the landscape, part Balkan, part southern. It has the peculiar glittering quality of the sea in that region, crackling with sun-points, and strange, sparse rocks edging cypress-studded hills.

An old engineer is sitting in his cottage. Neither White nor Red matter to him, only the engines of his ship. His son has joined the Reds and that annoys him; people have no business

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to meddle with politics. The little boy, his second son, plays with animals in the garden. The mother prepares dinner. And here is where Room's psychological studies are so valuable. A pleasant, comfortable, almost peasant woman, all smiles and cheerfulness, and a father, rather artistic, self-absorbed and a little tyrannical, would have sons such as these in the film; revolutionary and brooding, like the elder, or a little inclined to build up a phantasy world, like the small boy. In the few shots at the beginning the family world itself is shown; background that will be needed to emphasize the ending of the picture.

The town is controlled by the Whites. There is trouble in the barracks. Dissatisfaction grows; ammunition disappears. The Whites suspect it to be partly due to someone on the engineer's ship. They put their best spy to work on the boat with promise of reward. One night there is a scuffle in the barracks, sudden alarm, and a soldier escaping into darkness.

The Red sympathizers live in a small room on the outskirts of the town. Their job is to pass on fugitives and ammunition to the opposite shore. The girl in charge is engaged to the engineer's son. The soldier bursts into the room, his brief, startled words contrasting with the calm, dark southern night.

A tall Mohammedan in sheepskins rides across the hill with ammunition. He looks to the sea. The Reds should be nearing land to collect his heavy bag. It is desolate country. But someone has betrayed him. Right between the hills the Whites ride, and before his horse can climb the slopes he is shot down by a bullet.

The gramophone plays in the engineer's cottage. The little boy dances while his mother cuts out clothes. Soldiers break in and drag the engineer away before the record has time to play itself out.

Men, women and children, all the suspects they can gather, have been flung into the hold of a ship. Each day a few of them are dragged up, flung overboard. The engineer sits grieving over his engines. Who will oil them or clean them? The girl, engaged

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to his son, is flung down the steps after him. One by one the captives diminish, children die."

But some fugitives, and the engineer's son among them, have escaped to an old lighthouse. The cruelty in the ship has increased the hostility of the town to the Whites.

The officers of the Whites decide to send the engineer's ship against the lighthouse. But they have no one to work the engines. They remember the engineer. He is sent for and driven below with threats. His life is safe while he is needed for the machinery. They take the girl on board as well, thinking by bribes or tortures they can find out information about the fugitives.

Meanwhile the Reds prepare to fight under the leadership of the son. The little boy (children pass more easily and unquestioned) struggles up the hill towards his brother, with food. With news. The boy was excellent at this moment, a child's love of adventure suddenly changing into anxiety as to his father's fate and then breaking to adventure again, mixed with a shadow of apprehensiveness.

The ship approaches the lighthouse. Well armed, the soldiers form into a landing party. The spy, drunk and lazy, refuses to attend to the engines. From a chance word, the engineer realises he is directing the boat against his own son. But if the machinery is not looked after there will be an explosion. An idea strikes him, and he does not force the spy to continue work.

Meantime the girl has been questioned and tortured and flung back into a cabin. An explosion shakes the boat. It lurches, settles for sinking. Men jump into the sea. Waist high in water, the engineer struggles along a corridor, banging on doors till he finds and drags the girl to the upper deck.

The lighthouse watchers crowd to the sea edge, watching the boat sink. There are no survivors. Only the engineer is washed ashore. He has just consciousness enough to realise that his son is safe before he dies.

*The Death Ship* is perhaps a succession of flashes, of great but loosely-knit moments rather than one coherent film; the drive of

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the idea looses impetus between moments so that the final impression leaves one feeling that it is a good film instead of being great : comparing it, say, with *Bed and Sofa*, or *Ten Days* or *Das Dorf*. Yet to write this may be to be over-critical, for much of it is excellent, particularly the treatment of the landscape, the lonely sheepskin figure watching the sea, the fugitives scattered about the lighthouse wall, or the sensation of sunlight in the engineer's garden. Room has the capacity perhaps to deal with a small, rather than with a large, group. He is excellent again on the ship, where the spy and the sailors quarrel, fight suddenly, and go back in a flash to drinking and playing cards. The scenes with the girl, on the other hand, are less successful; one is almost afraid he will slide over into the conventional Hollywood torture-and-sudden-rescue, though again the shot of her caught in the water-filling cabin and the struggle of the engineer up the steps with her is realistic and full of power. But on the whole this film is full of the beginnings of cinema ; it has not the sure direction back of it that made *Bed and Sofa*. Between the two films Room's power of direction and conception of film must have widened and changed.

*The Pits*, Room's third film, is quite a different type of story. It is said that it was founded upon an idea sent to him by a workers' club, and many of the people filmed had never acted for the screen before. In Russia it is called *Ochave*, of which a literary translation is the rough, or the uneven, road. It has never been shown publicly outside Russia as far as I can discover. I was shown it in Berlin by courtesy of the Russian Handelsvertretung, the office for relations with foreign trade. A full account and appreciation of the film, by Kenneth Macpherson, appeared in the October issue of *Close Up*.

*The Pits* deals with one of the most important problems (perhaps the most important) of civilization. It is a matter that affects alike all classes and countries, whatever the political color of their rulers. From the adaptation of people to the question spring hatred and tolerance, strength and sickness, happiness and tragedy. Yet it is a theme that has seldom been handled in all

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its angles except in psychological documents or Russian films. For the problem is that of the relationship between husband and wife and how it may be broken by the birth of a child.

The film opens with some lovely shots of a glass foundry. The workers' club and out-of-door activities mix with shots of the men and women at work, and with spring in a country landscape. Blossoms and leaves. A man, employed in the factory, has fallen in love with one of the girl workers. Their lives together run smoothly and happily until a baby disrupts their companionship. Through changes, too, at the factory, the girl loses her job. She attempts to bring up her child, not knowing otherwise, according to old methods. Faced with loss of all he had valued in his wife, with dirty clothes, the baby crying, and a constant reminder of its presence in the washing hanging on a string across the one small room, the man takes to drinking, fails in his work, and in his general mental chaos goes to live with another woman. The girl loses all impetus to live and is baffled by the immensity of the problem in front of her. She does not know what to do. The baby cries. Its constant needs drive her distracted. Yet under the conditions pertaining in most countries they would be allowed to drift from bad to worse, blamed for their faults but shown no way to remedy errors, until the man would become so demoralized and antagonistic he would simply drift from woman to woman, and the girl would become another unskilled worker with no hope before her, while the child would probably die through want of proper care. But in *The Pits* the workers' club and, in particular, the head of the woman's section (played by V. Baranovskaya), prove their usefulness. The girl is shown how to look after her baby (this, which is one of the most highly skilled and technical professions in the world, is still supposed to be a natural inborn gift in every woman, as if every man should be expected to be without training a skilled engineer!), then she is found work and a place is allotted her baby in the children's home, where twenty or thirty children receive trained care from a specialist instead of being dragged up by old, haphazard methods, and where she may visit it after her work is finished. The man is left to come to his senses alone.

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At this moment the film seems to go to pieces badly. All the beginning is consistent and absolutely true. But for some reason at this instant a theatrical scene is inserted (can Room have been responsible for it?) in which the wife, having resumed her activities in the workers' club, acts in a play, the theme of which is her own story. Her husband sits watching her in the audience and she works herself up into a fit of hysterics, denouncing him for abandoning her and the child. She even follows this up by fainting in the best 1880 manner! The man dashes out, and thoroughly ashamed but unwilling to confess his fault, works so badly that there is a question of his being discharged. The girl, however, has applied to be transferred to a new factory. The husband makes the same request independently. And the picture ends with their chance meeting on the steamer that is taking them all towards a new, united life in the distant factory.

The theme is excellent, but the scene towards the finish is impossible. Kenneth Macpherson, in his excellent appraisal of the film in *Close Up*, October, 1928, suggests that Room listened to all the people who criticised *Bed and Sofa* for its lack of technique and tried to show that he was as good a technician as anybody. Or is it possible that the workers' clubs were not ready for sheer psychology and insisted upon melodrama at the end? Or is Room himself undecided, as in *Bed and Sofa*, seeing the obvious results of present conventions, but unable to scrap them utterly in his mind? For this is the great problem of the world, this question of mother and father and child, and it can be met only in two ways. The one way is the old: the woman must be a slave, without education and without rights, drudging her way along, dominated by the man and having no outlet but sex. And because she is so emotionally close to the child (psychologists have stated that sixty per cent. of all influence upon future development comes from the mother) too often she deflects or spoils its character, through love, through hatred, through ignorance. The other way is the new, not by any means fully accepted even in Russia, with the woman trained and equal to the man; his companion, neither a serf nor a marriage-licensed gold-digger. That

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way means the world steps forward. But a woman cannot be a companion and a worker if she has to do double labor; she cannot keep up with the events of the day while practical necessity binds her to the nursery. And a baby needs constant attention. First impressions in a child mould its future character. But too often children spend valuable years unlearning habits that with proper training they would never have acquired, and this applies just as much to families of the wealthier classes as to the poor. But how can any woman look after a house and train a baby properly at the same time? To say nothing of the fact that the emotional responsibility is usually too great for a parent to let its child climb, run and experiment as freely as it should. The solution, as shown in *The Pits* and *Das Kind des Anderen* (*His Son*), and as indicated in *Das Dorf*, is the nursery school. The baby school. A place where babies from birth can have the benefit of expert care.

Those familiar with psychology know that many neuroses and fears of later life have their origin in the child of two and three being trained to habits of cleanliness. But I have seen a nursery school where the children were trained from birth so that there was no sudden jerk of discipline just when the children were beginning to reason. This was possible in the school because one nurse could take up twenty babies hourly one after the other. It would be absolutely impossible in the home, particularly the servantless one. Objectors to the scheme take the attitude that unless the mother is made uncomfortable she would not have children. (A nurse remarked once that it was not wise to give mothers twilight sleep, as unless they suffered pain *they might not love their babies!*) This attitude seems to me utterly immoral. To begin with, an act so involved and dangerous as childbirth should be absolutely voluntary; then the question of what is best for the child should be the main consideration. If a child can grow up free and independent and healthy in a nursery school, it is better for it to be there than to grow up in an atmosphere of haphazard care and emotion. There is no suggestion in any of these films that the child should be severed from its parents. The nursery school is simply the solution of scientific care being given to all





From *The Death Ship*, the first picture made by Alexander Ro



*The Prisoner's Home*, the first film of a woman director Olga Prokoshchenskaya, dealing with women's problems in Soviet Russia. (L. Zaslavsky's Archive)



Yevgeniya R. Pushkina, a place for her child in the day Nursery Home

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babies alike and not to a few fortunate ones, while the relationship between husband and wife can continue undisturbed. (Far from being a deterrent it would probably be an encouragement to have a family.) If Room had shown us another household that by means of this solution had avoided the upheaval that threatened to wreck the couple's life in *The Pits*, or if some quiet scene between the girl and the man could have brought about the reconciliation, this picture would have been worthy of rank among the half-dozen great films of the world, but as it is, the shock of the school-girlish denunciation from the stage of the theatre is so great that the intensity of the beginning is blotted out and one cannot believe in the quietness of the end. One longs eagerly to see Room's next film. It was rumoured early in 1928 that he would make a half-Russian and half-German picture based on Maupassant's *Boule de Suif*, but no further news of this has been forthcoming, although Room was in Berlin for a time during the summer.

He is now at work in Russia on a new film entitled *The Ghost That Never Returns*, from the story by Barbusse. *The Pits* has been a great success, it is said, in Russia, but has not yet been generally released elsewhere.

Room is undoubtedly one of the great directors of the world. And what interests him most and what he is most successful in portraying are the processes of the brain which make up ordinary, normal life. It is this that makes his work amazing, because things are seldom shown, in films or literature or art or education, as they are. They are almost always colored to what it is felt the public expects them to be. Russia, Austria and Germany are the pioneers of this fight to recognise reality, though even Room is not daring enough to recognise it always; he can see the *is* but not always the step forward. Though there you have the problem. Not of the cinema only, but of life. For to see truth means upheaval.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE SOCIOLOGICAL FILM, I.

*The Peasant Women of Riazan* is one of the greatest and most beautiful films that has been made. It combines construction, beauty and dramatic power together with beautiful photography, as many of the outdoor scenes are done on panchromatic stock. (Panchromatic costs considerably more than ordinary negative and is more difficult to develop, but gives all colors approximately their true value and is therefore far more lovely to watch.) But the negative was destroyed in the fire at the Afifa works last autumn, and it is said that there is no other in Russia and that only a few scratched and worn copies are left. If this is so it is one of the greatest tragedies that have happened in the history of cinematography.

It is also an example of a problem of the Russian film world: that of keeping down costs. Most Hollywood films have three negatives; that is, during all the scenes there are three cameramen and three machines turning and the development costs are tripled. Naturally, it is not possible to afford this in Moscow, where the expenditure must be kept as low as possible. Only, if a negative gets destroyed, the whole labor of months is lost.

*The Peasant Women of Riazan* (*Das Dorf der Sünde*) was directed by a woman, Olga Ivanovna Priobrashenskaya. (It is a Sovkino film, released by Derussa.) She was born in 1885 and completed the eighth class at the Gymnasium. Afterwards she studied at the Moscow Art Theatre and acted under the management of Stanislavsky, Nemirovitch-Danchenko, Meyerhold, Mardianof, Tairof, etc., until 1913.

In 1913 she began to act for the films with the firm Timan and Reinhart.

## THE SOCIOLOGICAL FILM, I.

In 1915 she started work as cinema stage manager, at first under the direction of V. R. Gardin. Her first independent production was *Young Lady—Peasant Woman* (based on Pushkin), made in 1916, for the firm of Vengerof. She directed later, for the Neptune firm, Hamsun's *Victoria*. In 1919 she became artistic director of a class of cinema models in the first Gos-Kino school. She is said to be marvellous as a teacher. And she has worked uninterruptedly at cinema training from 1920 to the present day. In 1923 she helped to direct, with V. R. Gardin, *the Land-Owner and Locksmith and Chancellor*, for the Wufku, at Yalta. She has also made two films for children, *The Truth of Fedkin and Kiriliou*, and has just finished another full-length film, *The Last Attraction*.

Few women to date have used the screen creatively: this is economic circumstance rather than inability to use the medium. So much of the commercial cinema depends upon its women stars, but, apart from acting, opportunities are few, and the creative and artistic side is almost barren of names. But now, in Russia, Priobrashenskaya has made a film as great in its way as any discussed in this book, and one that is also an amazing sociological and constructive document.

It is utterly free from propaganda, this film. Somehow, a woman who thinks is freer than a man from political trammels. It is much harder for a man, perhaps, to break with convention. But the woman thinker (I admit there are few of them) seeks for truth.

• And truth is the underlying principle of *The Peasant Women*.

It is spring in Russia. Women, in gaily colored skirts, stand with their washing about the river edge. Long white strips of sheet bleach on the short turf. Ducks waddle in the mud and calves trot about the grass. The washing has to be done whether there is war or not. But it is pleasant on a spring morning when the earth is soft about the bank. These scenes are quite unhurried and the mind is allowed to rest on them, on the important things, with no suggestion that fire, avalanche or sudden pasteboard set will blot out reality with their tame expectedness.

The farmer Vassily (E. Fastrebitski) drives back from market with his son Ivan (C. Babynin). There is a lovely feeling here of

## FILM PROBLEMS OF SOVIET RUSSIA

the unsteady wheels and at the same time the certainty and un-sureness of a ford. Women shout greeting. A sack drops. Ivan slides off the cart to fetch it and meets Anna (R. Pushnaya), a war orphan, staring at the branches. They are too shy to be anything but in love.

The cart jolts on along a narrow track between thick flowers. And it is the road, with its ruts and tall weed, grass and field blossom, that seems to be important, rather than the men, both dreaming of Anna. Spring and such tranquillity that one wonders why the first sub-title spoke of "the years of war."

Vassilissa (E. Zessarskaya), the farmer's daughter, drags a baby calf behind her into the orchard beyond the farm and brushes through fruit branches to meet her lover, Nikolai, the smith. She does not hear her father's cart coming up the road. The young smith leaps over the hedge and runs through the leaf-patterned orchard. These shots are full of movement as the wind is.

But the farmer has seen them.

The farmer's wife waits outside the farmhouse door, and with her Vassily's former mistress (O. Narbekova) is standing with her little girl.

What will he have brought them from market?

The atmosphere is tense over supper. Vassily is furious that his daughter and the smith love one another. It is jealousy with him, not any question of fitness. When Vassilissa comes in, the farmer storms at her and orders her out of the room. She looks at him, and in that moment O. Priobrashenskaya achieves genius. For father and daughter *look* alike in that instant: mentally. The father's tyranny has become strength in the girl. In Ivan it has become weakness. A psychological probability well worked out throughout the film. Vassilissa turns proudly and walks out. Ivan, shocked and dreaming of Anna, forgets to dip his spoon in the communal soup bowl. At last the father can vent his anger upon someone: he dashes a spoonful of hot soup in the boy's face and shouts at him, "You dreamer, it is time you married," and Ivan, rebellious for once, runs out crying no.

But he cannot endure against his father's will. He sits with his eyes on the floor throughout the bethrothal bargaining. A

## THE SOCIOLOGICAL FILM, I.

girl lies weeping in a room. It is only at the final moment, when they have to look at each other's faces, that Ivan and Anna see that their own wishes have been fulfilled as well as parental commands.

There is shouting and dancing at the marriage feast, though Anna brings but a little calf and tiny dowry. The former mistress of Vassily dances, laughing and sweating like a heavy animal. Suddenly her merriment turns to morose anger, for she has caught the farmer looking at Anna, and knows what that look means. In the confusion Vassilissa and the smith slip away to talk to each other.

The father, angry and frustrated, finds them in the barn. He storms and threatens. But Vassilissa will not put up with his anger any longer. If the smith, she says, will promise to respect her as if she were his wife, she will live with him, since marriage is not permitted without the father's consent. Nikolai agrees and they walk out together.

Summer is short. Bare-footed, Anna follows Ivan to the cornfields. In the village, peasants smear pitch on the smith's door and constantly taunt Vassilissa. But what does that matter so long as they are together? Corn waves in the fields: long ears and shadows, light slants and little winds. (Much of this would not register on ordinary stock. These effects need panchromatic, as is used here.) But in the middle of work, the bell rings. More men are needed for war. More conscripts must go, and amongst them the smith and Ivan.

The villagers go with them up the road and then Vassilissa, as the men disappear, realises that she will be left alone to the jeers of the women, and Anna knows there will be no escape from the jealousy of Ivan's mother nor from the farmer's persecution. And none of them can read or write, so there is no hope of news.

Days go on. The farmer drives back alone from market, drunk. Women spin and gossip and tell tales in the large room. Only Anna sits alone. As they hear horses clatter through the rain, women and children slip away.

Vassily comes in with a sack. What has he brought this time from market? His wife and his mistress have fixed their eyes on

## FILM PROBLEMS OF SOVIET RUSSIA

the bag. And he brings out shawls for them. But from the very bottom he brings out a better, more beautiful shawl for Anna, and goes, drunk, in search of her.

The mistress, raging with jealousy, follows him.

Anna is in her room, but Vassily breaks through the door. There is no escape. As the farmer, half ashamed, goes back through the dark stairway, he meets his former mistress. Both stare at each other. Guiltily and uneasily.

Months pass. Anna has a baby. There is no news of the soldiers. But there is peace at last and men begin to drift back to the village. Nikolai returns, but the war has changed him. His good temper has gone and he is sullen and over-bearing. Vassilissa, however, has won by her activity a place on the village council. A messenger summons her to go and help with the childrens' home they are making. Nikolai forbids this angrily; her place is the home, to build the fire and cook for him and to wait upon his pleasure. But Vassilissa laughs and walks out, saying simply "that is at an end. We live in the new Russia."

Anna's life has become unbearable, and one day a letter comes—from Ivan. He also is returning home. Get out, the mother tells her, get out with the baby. But Anna does not know where to go. She wanders up the road and sits on a stone, crying, under the former landowner's house, which the more energetic younger women, under Vassilissa's direction, are making into the childrens' home.

Vassilissa, hearing crying, runs down the steps. She knows the story. But she has a solution. Anna must bear the situation a few days longer till the home is ready, then she can leave her baby in it and begin life over again.

The Spring Festival comes. There are swings, women laugh and fling garlands on the water. The farmer and his wife go out to the crowds. So does the mistress; and her child, replica of the mother, poses in front of the glass and leaves, sneering at Anna. It is interesting to see this, so true to what a lot of children are, copies of an adult world, only less powerful, rather than the innocent little beings most studios make them out to be. Anna,



## THE SOCIOLOGICAL FILM, I.

afraid to go, plaits her hair and watches through the window. Suddenly she sees Ivan and, afraid, runs from him and hides.

But Ivan has lost his sensitiveness in the army. He sees the baby, rages, joins with the family hurried back to welcome him. Terrified, Anna runs out and throws herself into the stream. Vassily first, followed by the others, runs along the bank, but it is too late. They carry the body home and sit looking at it.

At that moment Vassilissa enters. She wastes no time over the dead. Where is the living? She looks round the room, walks over to the baby and picks it up. "Your father, Ivan, is the guilty one," and she leaves them to their raging and reproach while she herself, with the baby in her arms, walks towards the childrens' home.

It is the child, and the living, that are important. This is so new in cinematography. New almost to literature. It is Vassilissa who has dared to do what she wanted to do, who has emerged from horror and despair and evil; Vassilissa with the fundamental desire to protect the growing thing. You should stay at home, the man says. And the women who stay at home meet with baseness and evil and jealousy and death because they are unable to protect themselves. Every woman who is economically independent makes the acts and the attitude of the father, and in a lesser degree, of Ivan and Nikolai, less possible. Vassilissa, who had no child and defied her father, protects all children. The farmer's wife, who had a family, attacked the helpless and forgot the baby. Anna, who was sensitive and submissive and weak, gave in to village customs and met death.

Over all the world the same things happen, in equal and lesser degree.

Not until women are able to care for themselves will there be real progress in development. It may be that husband and wife will not necessarily both be at work together, but unless the woman knows that she is able to go out and earn her living, there is always risk of tyranny. From the man's point of view, too, he should not have to feel that a family or a wife are to be a drag on him all his days.

## FILM PROBLEMS OF SOVIET RUSSIA

No State should have the right to demand life : military service for men and child-birth for women should be utterly a voluntary action. There are many women unfitted psychologically to bear children or more than one child, and their reaction (often unconscious) affects the baby more than anyone else. And as things are at present constituted, numbers of women desire children, but because of environment or circumstance do not marry. Under a decent system it should be possible for any woman in good physical health to have a child if she desired, and it should be held equally wrong for those who did not wish one to have them. And on birth it would be the rule, and not the exception, to place all children in a nursery school for the first few years of their life. And I write this from the point of view of the child.

It is this that is so great about *The Peasant Women of Riazan*. Priobrashenskaya has seen beyond faces into truth. The farmer is a tyrant, but he is illiterate and has nothing to break the monotony of his life but drink or finding a new woman. Ivan is sensitive and weak. When his sensitiveness is rubbed away he becomes a bully also, blustering to hide his incompetence. Anna is helpless and kind and meets disaster. The mistress is a heavy, sensuous animal, but kindly and comic, had not her passions of jealousy and anger been aroused. It is all lack of education and of intelligent amusement. But Vassilissa, learning and thinking, builds for a new age.

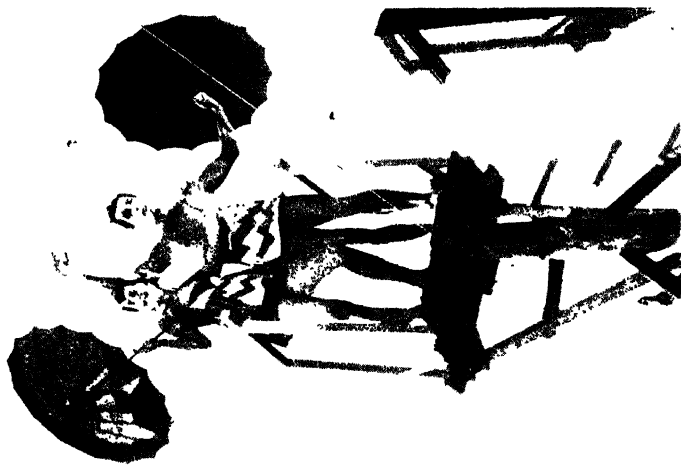
*The Peasant Women* seems to me the most moral film I have ever seen. It has expressed the entire core of village life, the attitude of gossip and tyranny from the old to the young, that drives the stronger types to seek the freedom of the towns, all over the world. Yet a few days ago a cutting reached me from an English paper saying that Russian films were the dirtiest the correspondent had seen, for in one of them a married woman had a child with her father-in-law. And that very same morning, opening the local paper, there was an account of a man who had violated and then murdered his daughter in a remote Alpine village, and then escaped to the hills whence he was driven by the winter snows. Another peasant situation repeated, and *not in Russia*. When people so blind themselves to what happens in the world



The Spring Festival in *The Peasant Women of Rta*



Nicolar (M. Savcheff) with Vassilissa in his smithy *The Peasant Women of Ruzan*



## THE SOCIOLOGICAL FILM, I.

one can understand any revolution. But I think there is a fundamental sanity in the English that would see and understand and acclaim *The Peasant Women* for the truth and constructiveness of its lesson.

Unless a copy was preserved in Russia, it is unlikely the picture can be shown again.

## CHAPTER VII.

### SOCIOLOGICAL FILMS, II.

Eugenij Cherviakoff, the director of *His Son* (*Das Kind des Anderen*), was born in Leningrad and educated in the lycee there. He is about twenty-eight. He then became an actor and assistant director under V. Gardin. Those who have seen the film will remember him as Pushkin, in *Tzar and Poet*. *His Son* is Cherviakoff's first film. It was released in Germany by Derussa in November, 1928, and an account was given in *Close Up* in the issue of that month.

The story is simple. Olga (Anna Sten) walks out of the maternity hospital with her baby. Her husband, Andrei (G. Mitschurin), is waiting for her with a sledge. On the staircase she manages to tell him that the child is not his. And the rest of the film is concerned with the trouble caused by gossip and interference. For Andrei belongs to the fire brigade and they live in a huge communal barracks. Andrei, left to himself, would have rapidly adjusted himself to the circumstances, for Olga assures him she is seeing the baby's father no longer. But the women gossip. They point at the father; they point at the child. Andrei is driven by this into fits of unjustifiable jealousy. He worries Olga night and day to tell him who the father was. And meanwhile the real father, Grigor (P. Beresof), another fireman, has been trying to get a glimpse of the baby. He follows Olga down the street. She takes no notice. Finally he catches up with her, talks to her. But, with her mind on Andrei, she answers "whether it were love or not, now it is over."

But she returns to find the women in the communal kitchen pointing at her baby and gossiping about her. One of the women

## THE SOCIOLOGICAL FILM, II.

in particular, an aged, thin and sarcastic spinster, is the personification of a type everybody has known, who is only happy when torturing—under the pretence of morality—other people. •

At last Olga tells Andrei, hoping to stop his persistent anger, who the father is. He rushes off to the sleeping quarters of the unmarried men, and before Grigor can wake from a heavy sleep seizes him and would have injured him severely had not the other firemen prevented it.

Days pass : Andrei takes to drink and neglects his work. Olga, unable to stand the gossip and suspicion any longer, goes to Grigor. But for all Grigor's kindness she still remembers Andrei.

Nor can Andrei find peace. He knows he has been wrong. A child dies in the barracks. The old women who have driven Olga out help with the funeral. The mother, rigid with grief, stands staring at the coffin. "She does not cry, she does not care," the old women whisper, and the thin spinster slaps the hand of the tiny sister who has stretched her fingers out to touch the dead baby. Gossip and ill-natured comment and ignorance, these are the great foes of the progress of the world.

But the head of the work committee goes to see Olga. Work is found for her. Her child is put in a nursery. And happiness begins again, from these two simple steps.

And this is the greatness of *His Son*. It gets down to sound psychology and to a constructive programme. The babies are shown eating, washing themselves, and sleeping in the home during the day, under the supervision of a trained nurse. They laugh. The one just able to lift a big spoon serves the tinier ones with their food. Olga, too, is not troubled with gossip any more. She has her work, and her child at night.

But one evening a fire breaks out in the house. Olga, the baby and Grigor try to escape down the staircase. Half-suffocated with smoke, Olga drops the baby. Grigor drags her out, half conscious only, into the street. As the ambulance men lift them on to stretchers, Andrei, come with the fire brigade, hears her call for the child. The house threatens to fall, but he plunges in and at last is able to come to the ambulance with the baby in his arms.

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He gives it to the mother, and as the ambulance jolts off the two men sit looking at Olga and each other.

The end is not very convincing; one wonders, even, if the German is different from the Russian version. The logical finish would have been earlier, when Olga found work. But it is a serious and beautiful film with great constructive value. Again, as in *The Women of Riazan*, the emphasis is placed on the child. It is better for the baby to be in a well-lit, airy nursery, with its mother at work, than in the midst of a family life founded on dissension. Dissension would never have occurred had it not been fanned by gossip and spiteful conversation. This is real morality, and if this reasoning were applied generally half of the tragedy and unhappiness of life would be prevented.

Anna Sten is better in this film than in the others I have seen her in, particularly in the opening scenes when she returns home with the child and when Grigor follows her down the street. It is a Sovkino film. Yet again there is no reason (there being no question of politics) why the film could not be generally released in England.

The theme seems a favorite one with the Russians. No doubt because it is constantly occurring in the new world after the Revolution. And they face the matter instead of trying to hide it. For, in the handbook of the new season's films, a Meschrabpom-Russ film is announced with the same story, *A Human Being is Born*. I have not seen the film, but quote the summary of it from the book. A type-setter's wife has a baby, but admits to her husband it was not his. He decides, however, to forget the matter and to live with her as before. But local gossip and malice prick him constantly until he flies into such rages that, in despair, the wife decides to kill the baby and herself. At the last moment the man realises his fault and saves them. And from that time on takes no notice of gossip. This film is directed by Jeliabushky, with Moskvina and N. Tichomirova in the chief parts.

E. Cherviakoff (director of *His Son*) will make, it has been stated, *Boule de Suif* (instead of *A. Room*, as was at first rumored), with Anna Sten in the chief part, for Derussa.



## THE SOCIOLOGICAL FILM, II.

*The Yellow Identity Card (Der Gelbe Pass)* is a film dealing with the pre-revolution regulations as to prostitutes. Part of it is very fine, but other sequences are not completely convincing. However, the director of it, F. Ozep, told me he could hardly recognise the German version, and I have not seen the Russian.

Jacob (I. Kowal-Samborski) returns to his village from military service. His wife, Maria (Anna Sten), and little daughter are working in the cornfields. This opening is excellent. One after the other, a villager recognises him and shouts, till his wife comes running through the corn and they turn together, rather shyly, and walk down the path towards their cottage.

The owner of the land is celebrating his daughter's wedding. Jacob and Maria beg for a piece of land. To please the daughter the petition is granted, but the land proves unfertile.

They struggle with the stones, and in the midst of their labor, Maria's second child is born. At about the same time the land-owner's daughter has a baby and needs a nurse for it. They remember Maria. At first Maria refuses to leave her own children, but when they cannot pay their rent she is obliged to go.

At the daughter's house in the city, Maria antagonizes the porter, for she will not let him make love to her. One day a letter comes for her, but the daughter reproaches her husband (V. Fogel) for having given it to the nurse, lest it should contain bad news on account of which they might lose her. In the midst of their quarrel Maria brings in the letter, she cannot read and begs them to read it to her. Actually, the letter tells of Jacob's misery and the children's illness, and that he will be turned out of their home as he cannot pay the rent. But the daughter reads out a different story, that all is well and that Maria must remain in the city. She whispers privately to her husband that money must be sent to Jacob to keep him in the village.

The husband forgets for several days, and when he does send it is too late. Jacob has already left, dragging the children with him. The baby dies on the way.

Meanwhile, the daughter's husband realises Maria is pretty. One day he locks the door and in spite of her struggles makes love to her.

## FILM PROBLEMS OF SOVIET RUSSIA

When Jacob comes to the door the porter, in revenge for Maria's refusal to have anything to do with him, explains that she has not replied to the letters because of her affair with the daughter's husband. Jacob, when Maria runs down the stairs, drags the child away and declares he never wishes to see her again.

The shock prevents Maria being a foster-mother any longer and she is dismissed. She has no place where she can go and wanders to a park.

There is a sudden raid, and, having no home, she is arrested with a number of prostitutes.

All of them are brought before the police; a motley collection. Maria has no passport. They hand her one, the yellow identity card issued to prostitutes. Not knowing what it means she goes to an employment office.

There she is immediately picked out from the other women by a plump old lady who wants a nurse for her children. All goes well till they see her card, when, of course, the old lady has hysterics and Maria is driven down the steps to fall into the clutches of a woman who takes her off to a brothel.

The following sequences are the key to the film. No attempt is made to obscure the reality of the scenes, and the mixture of gentility and vice becomes overwhelming. Each casual visitor is shown, psychologically : as they enter, as they leave. Repressed middle-aged men, drunk young farmers with a little money, fat women, thin girls, mingle in a large room together. They dance, they bow and hop; were it not for the faces they might be at some annual picnic outing. And gradually, couple by couple, they disappear up the stairs.

One day a visitor (N. Batalof), sprawled on a bed beside Maria, recognises her as a fellow villager. He gives her news of Jacob and later on sends her a letter in which she learns Jacob has been injured in a quarry accident.

Maria manages to escape from the house. She walks back to her village. Jacob, who has been unable to walk since the accident, stands when he sees her and pulls her towards him. And their fellow villagers leave them alone together,



Anna Sten and G. Mitschurin in *His Son*, a Sovkino film directed by E. Chers iakoff.



*His Son*



## THE SOCIOLOGICAL FILM, II.

In many respects *The Yellow Identity Card* is an extremely fine film. But it seemed to me that at moments, white was a little too white and black a little too black. For in the beginning Maria was shown working in the cornfield, and as both she and Jacob were young and strong, could they not have got work in their own village if she had wished not to go to the city as a nurse? Again, if Maria was so good a servant would her employers not have made some provision for her family, in order to keep her mind at rest and therefore, from their point of view, on her work? And would she have been quite so innocent as not to know what a yellow ticket meant? Perhaps there were other explanations in the Russian version that were omitted from the German. Possibly they felt it would not be possible to use the extremely realistic brothel scenes without the long preparation of a somewhat melodramatic story.

Whatever fault there was, was in the scenario, not in the direction. This showed great power and insight, and whenever one's sense of psychological verity was not disturbed by the tale, had the authentic quality of the best Russian cinematography. *The Yellow Identity Card* is a Meschrabpom-Russ film, released in Germany by Derussa. It was showing all last autumn in Berlin in large and small kinos and was very popular.

Mr. Ozep has recently finished directing in a German studio, for Prometheus, *The Living Corpse*, from the story by Tolstoy. The chief part is acted by V. Pudovkin and the film, it is announced, has been bought for England.

F. Ozep was born in Moscow and educated there at the lycee. He then went on to the same University that Pudovkin attended. When his studies were at an end he took up journalism and travelled abroad, staying for a time in Switzerland. On his return to Russia he began to write scenarios and joined the Collectif Russ, which afterwards became the Meschrabpom-Russ. The Russ was the only group that kept open right through the Revolution. (He worked on the scenario of *Polikouschka*, which dates back to this period, and which has been shown in London.) Mr. Ozep had charge of the literary management and wrote or worked on the

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scenarios for a great number of important films, among them *The Postmaster*.

The first film he directed was *Mess Mend*, his second was *The Yellow Identity Card*, and his third, the film he has just completed, *The Living Corpse*.



From *Moscow that Laughs and Weeps*, a Meschrabpom comedy by Barnet, featuring Anna Sten, V. Fogel, and J. Kowal-Samborski.



from *The Yellow Identity Card*, by F. Ozep for Meschrabpom-Rus





## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE WUFKU.

South of Russia, looking towards Asia across the Black Sea and extending upwards and west to the Polish boundary, is a vast stretch of territory—the Ukraine—which has its own studios and organization, the Wufku, for the making of films.

The climatic conditions of the Ukraine must be excellent for photography, for it is a flat and rich country, full of corn and sugar beet fields, pasturage and orchards. There are studios at Odessa and Yalta, and a third has just been finished at Kiev.

Wufku plan to show 117 Ukrainian, 115 Russian and Georgian, and 37 foreign films through the Ukraine for the season 1928-1929. They have also engaged a young girl, N. Tokarska, as cameraman. This is the first time a woman has been engaged as cameraman in the U.S.S.R.

Unfortunately, I have only been able to see one Wufku film, *Two Days*, though I have heard a reliable report of another, *Zvenigora*, and several others have been shown in Germany and Paris.

*Two Days* was made by Stabavoi, a young Ukrainian director. We had great difficulty in seeing the picture in Berlin, but were shown it finally by courtesy of Derussa. It was banned shortly afterwards by the German censor. The last I heard of it in Germany was that it was being cut and that they hoped a mutilated version would be permitted. Mr. Montagu and Mr. Brunel have a copy in England, and it may be shown in time at one of the Film Society's afternoon performances. Although it was the most uncompromising of the Russian films I have seen, it is so remarkable as a piece of art that this does not seem to matter. And I do not think the types are exaggerated. I think only they are rare.

## FILM PROBLEMS OF SOVIET RUSSIA

An account was given by K. Macpherson in the *September Close Up*, 1928, so I will only summarize briefly the story of the film.

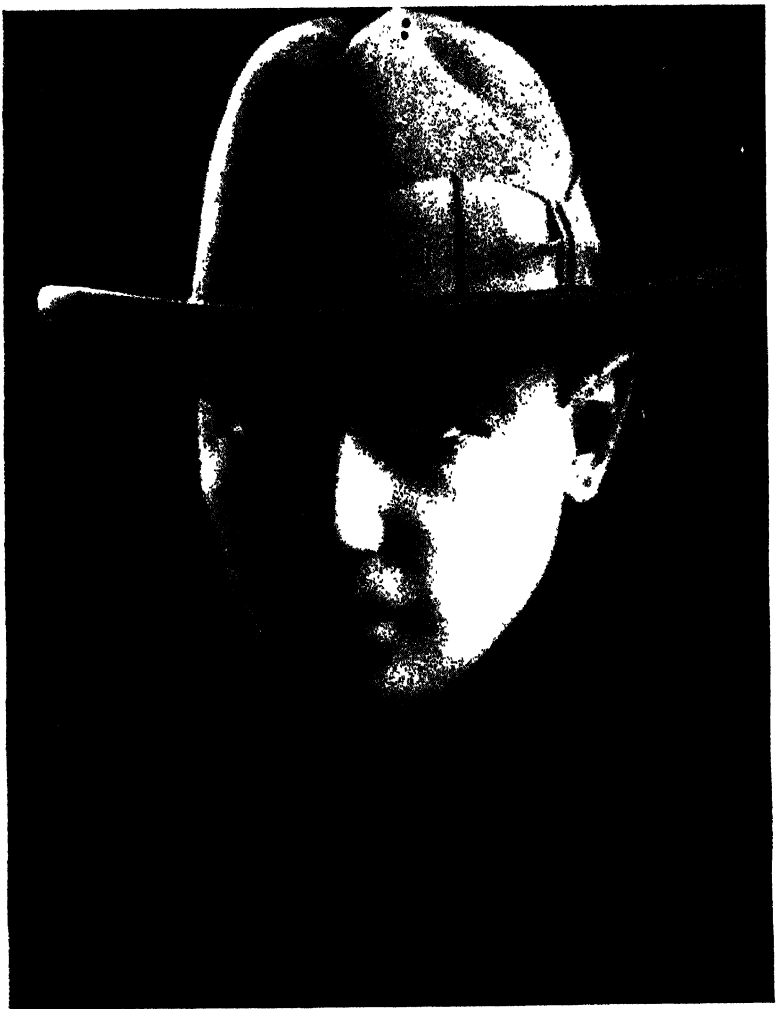
A wealthy family are leaving their large country house, before the arrival of the Red Army. This is magnificently done. Maids and the daughters fling unimportant and important things into ever more suitcases, the owner of the house paces up and down, whilst the caretaker, an old family servant, buries the plate in the garden. A motor car is waiting. As the family piles into it, a heavy suitcase falls on and kills a tiny puppy. The mother of the puppy whines. "Bury it." The old caretaker, as the car leaves, digs a hole for the animal near the treasure chest. Maids hurry away into the street with bundles. Then the caretaker locks up everything very carefully, straightens the disordered rooms, arranges the cigars in a box neatly, and goes up rather rheumatically to his own room, and there happens to take out the photograph of his own son, with whom he had quarrelled years before.

At the crowded railway station fear reigns. The young son of the owner of the house is pressed back into the mass of people, losing his family, and with them the last train. Alone, obviously for the first time in his life, he runs frightened and crying through the streets. And as he reaches the gate of the house the Red Army begin to ride through the town.

The boy beats on the spikes of the gate. Not until some minutes are past does the caretaker hear him. The dog in the garden howls over the dead puppy. There is an overwhelming sensation of fear. Hurriedly the caretaker drags the boy up to his tiny attic room and tries to calm him. (The boy's psychological reactions are very right. He has probably heard nothing, we may suppose, for years but alarmist stories about the revolutionaries. He has been thoroughly spoiled and at the same time never allowed any independence. Now his whole world has dropped away and he is helpless.)

And at this moment soldiers beat on the gate.

The caretaker goes down. He argues with the soldiers. They are in rags, most of them, but good tempered. Finally, the gate



George Stabavor director of *Free Days*, *Calumny* and other films



S. A. Munn (left) and F. E. Samytchkovsky in *Two Days*.



*Two Days*

## THE WUFKU

is opened unwillingly. The caretaker recognises the leader of the horsemen is his own son.

An interesting psychological situation arises. The father loves his son and wishes to tell him that he is sorry for their quarrel. But at each attempt, some trifle prevents and even makes them argue and fight again. Old habits break their happiness. For the father cannot shake off the habits of years. He is horrified when the soldiers camp in the hall, and open the cupboards curiously. And the son (whom one feels learnt his first lessons of rebellion from the indignities which he had watched his father suffer) cannot understand why the caretaker does not immediately see that the revolution is offering him deliverance.

Why can't his father sleep downstairs instead of in his little top attic?

Why must he worry if the soldiers do spread their blankets in the dining room?

And the father is agitated about the boy whom he has hidden upstairs.

It must have been a conflict familiar to many Russian families, this tension between the old and the new. Hard for both, because the old have not the belief in change. They have made their compromise, and to give up the rigid regulations they are used to, means to give up their life. And hard also for the young, who cannot comprehend why people should be slaves to unnecessary and cruel ideas and who yet love their family sincerely.

\* In the middle of the night the father creeps down a winding staircase to look at his son asleep.

But the howling of the dog disturbs the sentry. Finally, the dog scratches up the earth, and beneath the dead puppy the sentry finds the treasure. This is seized, of course, for the army war chest.

Next morning suspicion arises. Particularly when the father tries to smuggle food upstairs. But he is able to conceal the boy in a loft, and his own son, relieved at finding no one, asks his father to forgive him for having suspected him of concealing a fugitive.

## FILM PROBLEMS OF SOVIET RUSSIA

The Red horsemen ride off. But according to orders, the son remains in disguise to find out the movements of the Whites.

The Whites ride into the town, and all smiles and smirks, the boy (who has followed the son to his hiding place unobserved) rushes down the steps to greet the officers and denounces the caretaker's son.

He leads the soldiers towards the son's hiding place.

The son is captured. And hanged in the garden.

The father realises at last that he has been indirectly responsible for his son's death through his refusal to believe in him and the ideas for which he was fighting.

The second night he spends in the garden, where he can just reach the dangling feet of his dead son.

Towards dawn he creeps into the house and locks the doors. Most of the officers are drunk, the rest are asleep. He sets fire skilfully to the top rooms and the curtains. Then goes slowly again towards the garden.

Trapped, the officers try to break out of the flames. But the doors are solid and the locks will not give. The house crumbles and fire rages.

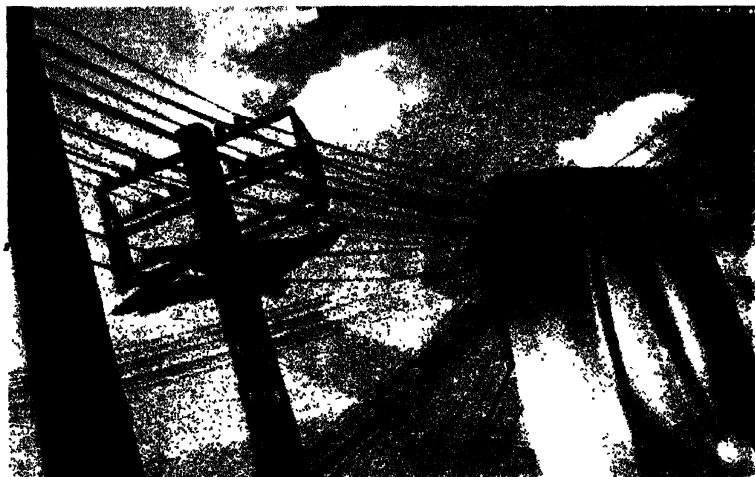
As dawn comes the father lies up the road with a bullet through him. And war rolling across the landscape.

The caretaker is played by F. E. Samytchkovski, and the son by A. E. Minin. The acting of Samytchkovski can be compared only with that of Baranovskaya in *Mother*. But one cannot think of acting in connection with *Two Days*. One can only think of it as a real occurrence.

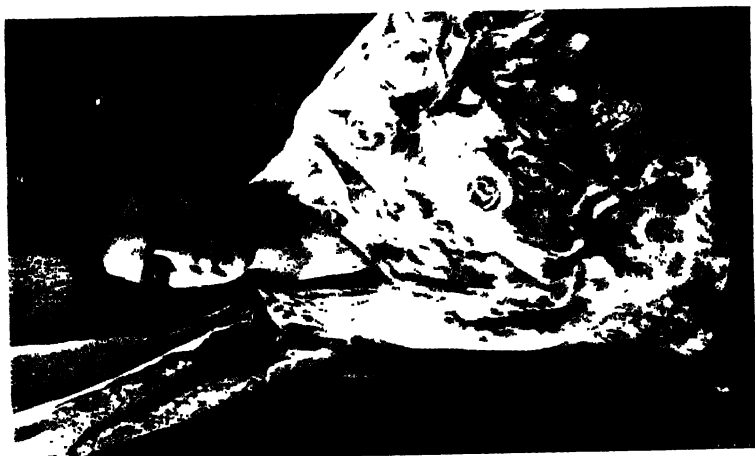
It is useless saying that such a thing could never have happened. That people are not so cruel, so merciless. I am afraid they are, though it is rare that it is carried to such lengths. I do not think; though, it is confined to any one political class. It arises from education rather than from politics. If we had the right type of education we could gradually eliminate cruelty, but as much of our present system is built up on cruelty—often called discipline—once barriers are removed things happen such as the action or, at any rate, the attitude, of the boy in *Two Days* who betrayed the man who had saved him.



From the *Eleventh Year* - a film by Vertov for Wutku, in commemoration of the  
eleventh anniversary of the liberty of the Ukraine



From the *Eleventh Year*.





## THE WUFKU

And here, it seems to me, is one of the great film problems of Russia. *Two Days* deals beautifully with the problem of a father and son, divided on the question of progress, but loving and respecting each other in a normal manner. It applies to many people and to many situations we know. But because it is straight and is set in the environment of the Revolution it is censored or forbidden. *Sorrell and Son*, founded upon an exaggerated father-son relationship (admissible if its evil were pointed out, but instead it is held up as moral!), is permitted everywhere and is shown to thousands. Not only this, but we are asked to accept as a main and tragic incident the rejection of a boy from school because his father happened to be a waiter. A school that rejects a boy on such grounds is not a fit place for any child. But will the film industry of Russia possess enough integrity to refuse to lower its standards, so that its films may be shown abroad? One knows the directors and actors will not consent. But, unhappily, negative costs money, and so does electricity. A man can write a book or draw a picture for a few pence worth of materials. But a great director's contribution to cinematography may be lost if he be debarred the opportunity to use raw stock or to burn his lamps. That is why it is essential at this moment that the artists of Europe, whatever their political beliefs, should unite to do away with a censorship that permits *Sorrell and Son* and forbids *Two Days*.

Stabavoi has made two other films, not yet shown in Europe, called *Calumny* and *The Man of the Forest*. He is now working on *A Pearl of Semiramis*, a film which has for subject the story of the foundation of Odessa.

Among other films now being made in the Ukraine are *Inside the Convent*, which deals with female monastic life, directed by Kardine, and *The Eve*, directed by Grinyeef.

I am indebted to Mr. Macpherson for the following brief review of *Zvenigora*, which I was unable to see personally.

*Zvenigora* was made by Dovenkof, and was remarkable for the acting of Nicolas Nademsky, a youthful actor who played the part of a white-haired and white-bearded old man. The story is fantastic, and blends realism with long digressions into dreams of Vikings and a ship with treasure. The great fault of *Zvenigora*

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is muddle. It is an effusion of ideas scrambled rather than put together, and the intertwining of actual event with the mystic, half-occult evocations of the old man were not a unity, nor convincing on either plane. The mystic occupied the greater part of the film, and can be likened to the spirit of the earlier scenes of the *Student of Prague*, or the sequences in *Faust* where the devil is summoned to the moor. This feeling was rather the intention than the effect, for the effect suffered from the curious impetuosity and muddle which is to be associated far more closely with the Russia of the past than the Russia of to-day. *Zvenigora*, whose story is a series of irrelevant episodes, has at moments true vision, very much like the earlier writing of Dostoeffsky, where the desire to express the finer ideas becomes a rush of incoherencies with here and there the emergence of something startling or beautiful. By far the weakest sequence of the film is the long dream in the middle, in which the Viking figures tramp, as though floating, with the unfortunate effect of not appearing to float, so that their movements became irritating simply.

There are some charming moments between the old man and the half idiot boy that follows him, hanging open-mouthed upon the old man's stories; there are some lovely countrysides, and grassy hills. The hills remain as important, for it is while seated on them, with bramble bushes, and wind in the grass and in the old man's hair, that the illusion of magic is most strong. *Zvenigora*, more carefully worked out, might have been a film of great lyric beauty.

It has not been shown in Germany yet, but has had quite a success in Russia. A portion of the film was shown this year by the Ciné Club de Genève.

Dovenkof is working at present on *Arsenal*, which deals with the events in Kiev in 1917-1918, and has Nademsky in one of the chief parts.

Vertof, who made *Eleven* (or *The Eleventh Year*), has finished *The Man With The Movie Camera*.



From *Zemgora*, a Wutka film directed by Doyenkov. Nikolai Nidensky as the old man.





From *The Arsenal*, a new Wutku film by Dovnenkot, director of *Zemgor*



From *Timmy Niggins*, a Wutku film, directed by Tassine from a story by Sinclair  
Bouchard

## CHAPTER IX.

### MISCELLANEOUS FILMS.

Among miscellaneous films I have seen one excellent comic picture, *Moscow That Laughs and Weeps*, two "Westerns," *The Son of the Mountains* and *Revolt in Kasan*, a dreary reconstruction drama, *The Tsar and the Poet*, and I have heard a reliable account of Protasanof's *The Forty First*.

It is rare to find originality in a comic, but *Moscow That Laughs and Weeps* is full of old episodes treated in a new and most amusing manner. It is a Meschrapom-Russ film directed by Boris Barnet, with Anna Sten, who will be remembered from her work in *His Son*, V. Fogel and J. Kowal-Samborski.

B. V. Barnet was born in 1902. When he had completed his studies at the Middle School, he studied for some time at the School of Painting and Sculpture. After the War, Barnet took up boxing and devoted himself to this sport for some years. In 1921 he entered the cinema studio of Kuleshof, where he worked as an actor. His first part was in the picture, *Adventures of Mr. West in the Country of the Bolsheviki*. He acted afterwards in the physical culture film, *On the Right Track*. In the capacity of actor, joint manager and joint scenic artist, he took part in the construction of the film, *Mess Mend*.

The title of *Moscow* is impossible. In a Voks handbook I have, it is entered as *The Girl With the Box*. This is less clumsy, but most unoriginal. It was made in 1927 and was released throughout Germany by Derussa, in 1928.

*The Girl With the Box*, played by Anna Sten, lives with her old grandfather in a village some distance from Moscow. She

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travels daily to the city, where she is employed in a hat shop. The stationmaster (V. Fogel) is in love with her, to her amusement, but her real attention is given to the hats which she trims and packs into a box to take to town.

The stationmaster wades through the deep snow to meet her. But she dodges him, and at the precise moment he wants to be most romantic he slides backwards down a long slippery track cut from the distant part of the village to the station. This is really excellent. It is not exaggerated—it just happens. And it is followed by an effective shot of a tiny black speck of figure tramping solemnly against white snow piled to white cloud. In retrospect this beginning is the most effective part of the picture, because it is founded on everyday events; the snowbound houses, the slide, the morning scurry of workers to catch the train. And the arrival at the station is certainly the best moment in the film. A number of old peasant women are waiting to go to market. Fogel is at the ticket window. But he stays to flirt with Anna Sten so long that when the train comes in there is still an indignant queue with a few seconds only to get their tickets.

There are more adventures in the train. A gymnastic teacher (Kowal-Samborski), bound for Moscow, tramples clumsily on the precious hat box. The train is crowded and, of course, everyone takes sides, for and against.

And there is trouble in Moscow. The hat shop is kept by a thin but domineering wife and a small, cunning husband. Naturally, they are trying to dodge taxes. They are also trying to dodge the housing laws, for in order to keep an extra sitting room they have registered their employee as having a bedroom there. But the police are suspicious, for whenever they call the girl is out.

And on top of the police, the tax collectors call to inspect the hats and, of course, the husband does not recognise them and keeps dragging out caps and bonnets from all possible hiding places. So the day begins badly for everyone.

Going out into the cold winter evening, the girl finds the gymnastic teacher has been unable to find a lodging. An idea occurs to her. They will marry, just in name, and then he can

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have the room to which she is entitled at the hat shop. For she herself must make the long daily journey to look after her grandfather. The indignation of the hat shop proprietors when she arrives with her husband and claims the room in the middle of a dinner party can be imagined. They dare not refuse on account of the law, but everything is stripped out of it, and as by this time the last train has gone, she and her husband sleep as best they can on the cold bare boards.

The following morning she asks for her wages, but is refused them, and given instead a lottery ticket they believe to be worthless. She takes this and goes home.

Soon afterwards they hear on the wireless that the ticket they have given away, is the winning number.

There is a general chase out of Moscow by the hat shop keeper to try and buy back the ticket for as small an amount as possible, and by the husband to warn her to keep it. Fogel, very jealous, joins in the pursuit, knowing nothing of either side, and throws both of them out into the snow.

There is another rush back to Moscow, where everything is cleared up and the girl gets the lottery money. But her husband now (after a fight with Fogel) feels he ought to terminate the arrangement made to get him a shelter and rushes off to procure divorce papers. She, however, writes on the form she refuses, and it ends in a general reconciliation.

There is no reason why this film should be censored : it is utterly non-political, and as it presents many comic incidents treated in a fresh, original manner, it ought to run for weeks in the popular cinemas if released in England. It is full of moments such as the snowy path, the slide, the struggle for a seat in the train, that are part of everyday life, but being shown in a Russian unfamiliar setting, become as new as the strange landscape. The whole moves with the speed one associates with American comic films, and V. Fogel is particularly good as the provincial, romantic stationmaster. Possibly variety of experience makes Russian cinema actors so good ; compare the different parts he has played, the hunted, half-mad servant in *Sühne*, the friend in *Bed and Sofa*, the gentleman in *The Yellow Identity Card*, and the bewildered

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stationmaster in *Moscow*. A great difference from the Hollywood method of making any actor repeat constantly his first success.

Barnet has just finished another film, which I have not seen, called *The House in Trubnaya Square*, also a Meschrabpom-Russ production. This includes V. Fogel and N. Batalof again, and A. Woizek (who was Fatme in *Revolt in Kasan*). It is said to be a satire on the lower middle class life of the occupants of a block of flats in a city.

Parascha, a peasant girl, goes to Moscow and is employed as a servant by Golikof, a hair-dresser. She renews her friendship with a chauffeur, Stephan. One day a play is given, and Golikof, as a general, is supposed to shoot Stephan, a communist. Parascha, in her excitement, forgets it is a play, and attacks Golikof with a stick, in revenge for his supposed attack on her friend. Golikof angrily dismisses her the next morning.

About the same time, however, the elections are on and one Parascha is elected delegate. Golikof mistakes the similarity of name and rushes in search of his servant to take her back with much ceremony to his shop. When he discovers his mistake she is again dismissed, but this time the Trade Union takes up the case.

Parascha, however, finds a new place—as wife to Stephan.

Apparently, from the stills, Fogel plays Golikof. It should be a very amusing film, if it is as good as *Moscow That Laughs and Weeps*. Barnet's films are said to be very popular in Russia. He made also *Moscow in October* for the tenth anniversary of the Revolution. They have more possibility of success than the American films, as in the midst of some really amusing Hollywood incident, the director is reminded that certain conventional ideas must be observed. The Russians, however, can depend on psychology for their effects, in comedies as well as their more serious films. It is a great pity if they are still kept from the English screen, merely because made in Moscow.

I saw *The Son of the Mountains (Abrek)* in Switzerland, and full particulars of the film were not given. It was released in Germany by Prometheus and is a typical "Western," chiefly interesting for the many scenes taken in the Caucasian mountains. English





*Isvya*, a Sovkino film, directed by A. Ivanovski. A film from the life of the



From *The House in the Tsvetnaya Square*, a new comedy by Barnet for Meshrabpom-Film. A satire on the life in a large block of flats.



From *Revolutions*, Soyuzdetfilm directed by Yuri Taritski



From *The Captain's Daughter*, another film by Yuri Taritski

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people are apt to associate snow with Russia and to forget that much of the country is Mahomedan and subject to intense heat rather than to ice. For this reason alone the film is valuable. It begins in a village set on a spur of the Caucasus, and one might almost imagine one was watching a scene from the American film of the Persian mountains, *Grass*. The theme is the usual one, of Russian soldiers oppressing the peasants until a "Robin Hood" arises, the son of the mountains. It is curious how little folk tales alter the world over, for most of the Robin Hood incidents are repeated. As the soldiers ride to the village, he swings into the town, into the governor's house. He pretends to be shot, but it is a bundle of clothes that has fallen over the precipice. Finally, he gives himself up as a ransom for his village on the promise that he shall be shot like a warrior. Of course, they take him to be hanged and, of course, he asks to dance and gets away, though his friend is killed. He disappears in a cloud of dust—and revenge—to the hills.

Several children went to this film on my recommendation and enjoyed it. But its chief interest in retrospect remains the scenery and a certain rough, "cow-boy" quality of movement.

There could be no possible reason for censoring this film, particularly as its theme is much the same as that of *The Gaucho*, and many other American films that are shown freely.

The Russian title of *Revolt in Kasan* appears to be *Bulat Batir*. It is a Sovkino production, directed by Youri Taritsch, and was released in Germany by Prometheus in the autumn of 1928, under the title of *Brand in Kasan*, its original title, *Brand in Volga Land*, having been forbidden owing to another firm claiming the Volga title for their film. The dispute about the title is still unsettled.

The story of the film takes place in the time of Catherine II, when the Russian governor of Kasan (a large city on the banks of the Volga) repressed harshly those Tartars who refused to accept Christianity.

The troops storm a village, where they wound Bulat Batir, kill his wife and carry off his little son Achmed as a prisoner. Bulat escapes to the steppes, collects rebels round him and joins

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Pugatscheff, the leader of a peasant movement against Catherine's rule.

Meantime, Achmed has been brought up as Russian and has become a lieutenant in the army. One day, when sent upon an expedition of destruction to a Tartar village, he intervenes in the brutal questioning of a small child. Later that day he is captured and Fatme, the adopted daughter of Bulat Batir, intercedes for him on account of his having tried to save the little boy. Achmed, however, is bound to a tree and a fire is lighted. But the second son of Bulat, Timur, turns traitor and offers to free Achmed if the Russians will reward him. They reach Kasan and shortly afterwards Bulat, betrayed by Timur, falls into Achmed's hands. But Achmed remembers his Tartar ancestry, frees Bulat and goes to work in Kasan for the freedom of his people. He is betrayed by Timur and saved only by the capture of the city by Pugatscheff and Bulat. Achmed kills Timur and rides with Fatme, after the Tartar horsemen.

The chief merit of this film is the scenery. The photography is good, three cameramen are mentioned, W. Giber, A. Solodnikoff and N. Sokoloff. The moments when Pugatscheff's troops cross the Volga and when the soldiers race up the winding hill to the castle are particularly beautiful. Tartars riding always seem more exciting than cowboys, but perhaps this is due to an early acquaintance with Marco Polo's travels. The film would be excellent for a children's programme, partly because it is the sort of tale they like, full of escapes and fighting, and also because it gives interesting shots of a landscape unfamiliar to most English people. One misses, however, the intensity one is accustomed to in Russian films. There is not the slightest reason why this film should not be shown throughout England with a U. certificate.

Bulat was played by W. Jaroslavzeff, Achmed by Ivan Klukvin, Timur by A. Schukof, and Fatme by Anna Woizik.

Another film directed by Taritsch, *The Captain's Daughter*, also a Sovkino production, was expected to arrive in Berlin during the winter. This deals also with the same period as the Pugatscheff story. It is taken from a novel by Pushkin. A rich farmer sends his son to do his military service, but on his way the boy is caught

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in a tremendous snowstorm, from which he is rescued by a mysterious stranger. Scenes follow in which the boy, Grinyef, becomes engaged to Mascha, the daughter of the commander of the fortress where he is stationed. But they are all caught up in the revolt led by Pugatscheff, who turns out to be the stranger who had saved Grinyef in the snowstorm. Pugatscheff is betrayed by his own Cossacks and Grinyef and Mascha escape with difficulty to their farm.

*The Tsar and the Poet*, directed by V. Gardin, and founded upon the life of Pushkin, seemed a very dreary affair. It was released in Germany by Derussa, and according to the German trade papers has been bought for America. But it has none of the qualities of compression, intensity and psychological insight which one associates with Russian cinematography. Perhaps their genius is better adapted to deal with machinery and modern problems than with historical reconstruction. The film was sentimental and full of a romanticism that has been better done in Hollywood. It is said to be very popular, and I can only record my opinion. But it is the sort of picture that might so easily be shown in England and America as an example of Russian methods, while actually it has far more in common with D. W. Griffith than with the development that produced Eisenstein and Stabavoi.

Pushkin, for example, is shown playing with his children instead of going to court. But instead of showing him talking to them or playing with them, in the way Room might have shown it, with great emphasis on psychological detail, Pushkin merely buries his head in their necks, kisses and hugs them. After hundreds of feet of this, one was almost sympathetic with the wife when she went off with a preposterous-looking officer. Then there were yards of fountains, big fountains, little fountains. Splashing water everywhere. And a death scene done in thoroughly conventional manner and lasting half an hour.

One's critical sense rebels at judging a director by one picture, but I feel it is very necessary to warn people who may see *The Tsar and the Poet*, because it is a Russian film, that it is not representative of modern cinematography. But it is interesting to see it in conjunction with other Russian films and to note that

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the same tendency to sentimentalize and portray emotions by stock symbols exists in Russia equally as in England. Perhaps V. Gardin, one of the oldest directors in Russia, is better in a less stylized subject. *Kastus Kalinovski*, another film directed by him, is announced on the list for the 1929 season in Berlin. Kastus Kalinovski, the hero of the film, is the leader of the rebels in the revolutionary period of 1863. It is a Belgoskino production, and the chief parts are played by Sofia Magarill, Nicolai Ivanof and Nikolai Simoneff, and is a film thoroughly disliked in Russia.

But I do not wish to form any definite opinion of V. Gardin's work until I have seen another film. So many things may unite to make one picture quite unrepresentative of the director who made it.

I have not seen *The Forty First* myself, but it is ranked among the best of the earlier Russian films. No copies were available in Berlin when I was there, as all copies were in use in the smaller German cities. It is said to be most popular in Germany.

It is a Meschrabpom-Russ film, directed by Protasanof. It was released in Germany by Derussa in 1928 and was made in Russia some time ago, from a story by Lavrenof, a young Russian writer who himself fought through the Revolution.

Mr. Oswald Blakeston gives a full account of the film in *Close Up*, November, 1928, of which the following is a brief summary.

Two companies of soldiers are fighting in the sand. The best shot of all the revolutionaries is a girl. She fires at the officer commanding their opponents, "the forty first." He is found, however, to be only wounded, and they decide to take him to headquarters. On the way they lose their camels and get short of water in a sandstorm, and reach a village only after great privations. The girl and the officer drift into friendship. Finally, the soldiers embark on a ship, but it is wrecked in a storm and the girl and the officer only are able to reach the shore.

They live alone for weeks. The girl loves and is happy, but the man grows tired of his primitive existence and longs for rescue. At last they see a sail. But as the boat approaches the girl realises that the man will leave her at the earliest possible moment. She



From *Kastyus Kalinowski*, a Belgoskino film directed by Vladislav Gardin



Alexandra Wozetk in *The Forty-First*, a Meshrabpom-Film directed by Protosano



L. Frithgenkott and C. Koppitz co-directors of many films the latest of which is *The New Babylon*



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shoots him as the sailors come because "he was the forty first to fall to her rifle and the only man she had loved."

Protasanof is said to have all the qualities of the great Russian directors, and two other films directed by him are on the 1929 list for release in Germany. One is historical, the other a satire. The scene of the historical film, *The White Eagle*, is set in 1905. The governor of a large town is blamed for not adopting sterner measures towards the strikers. The political police therefore organize a demonstration and provoke a riot. Many of the workers are shot. The governor is rewarded with the order of the White Eagle, but a wave of hatred sweeps through the town. The chief spy, who had provoked the attack, is discovered. The political police need him no longer and dismiss him. He appeals to the governor, who orders him out of the room, and in his anger the spy shoots the governor dead. This is also a Meschrabpom-Russ film, with Anna Sten, W. I. Katschalof and W. E. Meyerhold.

The second film, *Don Diego and Pelagea*, is a satire against red tape. Golovitsch, a stationmaster in a lonely village, spends his time reading old Spanish romances until fantasy and reality merge in his mind. One day the villagers surprise him fighting an imaginary duel. Their laughter makes him so angry he arrests an old peasant woman, Pelagea, who crosses the railway line, in that moment, at a forbidden place.

Pelagea is sentenced to three months' imprisonment. Her husband appeals to the authorities in vain. Finally, some young people take up her case, succeed in having her released and in holding up to ridicule the futility of "red tape."

The chief actors are Blumenthal-Tamarina and M. Sharof.

Those who have seen his films say Protasanof has an intense interest in humanity as opposed to any set system which says this thing or that is right. He uses landscapes to emphasise moods and has a wide knowledge of the psychology of individual types. He shows the extenuating circumstance, but never forgets the root of the issue.

Protasanof was also the director of *Aelita*, a film based partly on a novel by A. Tolstoy, and which contrasted scenes in the Russia of 1919-23 with fantastic effects supposed to be set on Mars. It is

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reported that actors from opposite schools and pupils from the State School of Cinematography were used in the production, and that very interesting artistic effects were achieved. It was a Meschrabpom-Russ production and was shown some years ago in Germany and Austria.

Other films on the new Berlin list are *New Babylon*, a Sovkino production directed by G. Konsintzof and L. Trauberg, and *Assya*, also Sovkino, directed by I. Ivanovsky.

*New Babylon* is an attempt to show by means of various episodes the spirit and the temperament of the Paris Commune. *New Babylon* is the name of a large departmental store whose owner is interested, for business reasons, in the continuance of the War. Paris is shown in the hands of the Commune and during the siege. The story of a French soldier and of a shop girl who is killed is interwoven with impressions of the later days of the Commune. It is said to be a very fine and realistic picture.

L. Trauberg was born in Odessa in 1902. In 1921 he organised, together with Konsintzof, the T.E.K.S., which stands for "The Factory of Eccentric Actors." He is a noted scenario writer and has worked hard in the teaching of cinematography.

J. Konsintzof was born in 1905 and trained as a painter. In 1920 he became director of the opera comique in Leningrad and in 1923 began to work with Trauberg, as a director, in films.

They have made the following pictures: *The Adventures of Octiabuna*, 1921; *The Devil's Ring*, 1925-6; *The Cloak* (from a story by Gogol), 1926; *Brother*, 1926-7, and *S.V.D.*, 1926-7.

*Assya* tells the story of an illegitimate girl brought up as a bondwoman. She falls in love with Stephan, the stable boy, but this being discovered, she is sold to a neighbouring farm and the boy is severely punished. They try to escape together, but are caught in a snowstorm and only reach Petersburg after much suffering and many adventures. She finds her father, and on his recommendation they are freed.

But the chief films for 1929 are *Zuchthaus* (*The Prison*), *Prisoners of the Sea*, and *New Babylon* (see above).

*Zuchthaus* is a Gosvoyenkino film, and shows the struggle of the political prisoners before the Revolution against the attempt to

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break their spirit by mixing them with the worst types of criminal and inflicting on them many physical and mental torments. It is directed by J. Raismann, from a manuscript by S. Ermolinski. They have tried to depict not the struggle of one individual, but the daily life of an entire prison and the struggle and despair of the prisoners.

*Zuchthaus* was shown in Berlin in early February. It is the story of a prison in Siberia and of the treatment accorded to the political prisoners. Their lives become so unbearable that Ilya Berz (A. Schilinsky), one of their number, decides to commit suicide to draw the attention of the outside world to their plight. He and his comrades are saved by the revolution. The photographs are extremely thoughtful (the cameraman is L. Kosmatoff); Raismann's method has been compared by Berlin critics to that of Dreyer in *Joan of Arc*, though opinions differ as to the quality of the film. The prevailing opinion seems to be that he is a director of great ability and promise.

I saw a collection of stills in Berlin that were amazing and bore out the suggestion made that it was a film able to rank among the best work of Russian cinematography. It has been released in Germany by Derussa.

*Prisoners of the Sea* is also a Gosvoyenkino film, with Derussa release, directed by M. Werner. The German title is *Gefangene des Meeres*. The story of this begins in 1919, when Lehr, a commander in the Red Army, is left behind in a town by accident and arrested by the Whites. While in prison he makes friends with a sailor, Filipoff, who hands over to him important papers. These are, however, discovered, and both men are condemned to death. They are able to escape, however, severally, but do not meet for eight years, when Filipoff is appointed as officer to a submarine commanded by Lehr. They are suspicious of one another. One day the submarine follows a suspicious ship, but through a sailor's carelessness water forces its way into the hold and the submarine sinks. The crew endure hours of agony, but as hope is at an end a diver makes his way to the bottom of the sea and a crane is enabled thereby to pull the submarine to the surface. When the diver throws back his helmet Filipoff is

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astonished and ashamed to see the face of Lehr, whom he had mistrusted.

The chief parts are played by O. Knipper-Tschechova, N. Kutusof, I. Strauch and A. Kramof.

As between a hundred and a hundred and fifty full length films are turned out annually in the various studios of U.S.S.R., exclusive of educational and short pictures, and as only about twenty of these are available abroad, and then chiefly in Germany only, it is impossible to give more than an outline of what may be expected in the 1929 season. England, particularly, is faced with a difficult task when dealing with the Russian cinema. For should films be freely released in London, the developments of ten years would have to be gulped down with all the new productions; rather like asking someone to read all the Elizabethan writers, including Shakespeare, in three months, in haphazard order, and form a critical judgment upon it. For up to date of publication of this book no modern Russian films have been shown in London except *Mother*, and *The End of St. Petersburg*, for one performance each at the Film Society, and *Bed and Sofa*, which is announced for a forthcoming programme there.

We have much to make up in comparison with France, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland. It is to be hoped that united protest by English desirous of intellectual liberty will remove the barrier to our cinematographic development and that we shall be able to study the new Russian films as they appear.

As this book was already in the press, I received from Moscow, the following short notices of Poselsky and Taritsch.

Yakov Mikhailovitch Poselsky was born in the year 1892. He received higher education and has been working at cinematography since 1914. He began to work independently in 1916. He made a number of pictures, including *The Disused Nest*, *Ganousya* (after Sienkievitch), etc.

After the February Revolution he worked at Odessa on the film, *The Life and Death of Lieutenant Schmidt*. From 1919 to 1925 he made, in Moscow, *Workers, Arise! In Defence of the Peasant*, *The Affair of the Horse-Doctor*, *Matof*, and other pictures. He made as well for Meschrabpom (International Workers' Aid) the

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cultural films, *To All Workers at All Times* (on the metric system) and *The China and Glass Industry*.

Recently he has been working for Sovkino on cultural films and has made *The Food Problem*, *Ten Years of Soviet Medicine* and the *Workers' Spartakiada*. Several photographs from the *Spartakiada* have appeared in *Close Up* and many comments have been made on their extreme beauty.

He is now at work on an educational film, *The Hygiene of Women*, and states: "I am trying to find the most simple and convincing forms of screen treatment of the theme, taking into account the psychological peculiarities of the proletariat spectator."

It is a pity that some of the educational films, and particularly the *Workers' Spartakiada*, cannot be shown in England, as they sound just the type of picture to be most popular with an English audience.

Youri Viktorovitch Taritsch (who directed *Revolt in Kasan*) was born in 1886. Higher education.

He worked in the Red Cross division at the time of the Japanese War. He then helped in the organization of the military revolution. Prison and exile followed, with six years of acting in the provinces. In 1914 he composed the scenario for *Tragedy of the Nabatof Family*, directed by Libkin. The World War and the Revolution found him again an actor in Moscow, but he left the theatre for the kino. In 1919 he worked in the Taldikin pictures, *Five Storeys*, etc. He began to work seriously at cinematography in the winter of 1923, when he wrote the scenario for *The Band of Father Knish*, directed by A. Razoumni for the Gos-Kino.

The Gos-Kino commissioned him in 1924-25 to prepare a large number of scenarios:—*Enemies*, *A Black Business (Wolves)*, *Moroka*, *Lenin Junkers*, *Abrek (The Son of the Mountains)*, *The Swineherd*, *Grishka*, and *The First Fires*. In the capacity of joint manager with E. A. Ivanof-Barkhof, he helped to make *Moroka* and *First Fires*. His best work is *Ivan the Terrible*.

Of the women directors, Esther Shoub is one of the most noted and has made *The Fall of the Dynasty of the Romanofs*, *The Great Road*, and *The Russia of Nicolas II. and Leo Tolstoy*. All these

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films were based on material furnished by historical and kino documents. She is now working on a film to demonstrate current social events.

It would be possible to extend this list of directors and films indefinitely, but it is not possible to write critically of pictures there has been no opportunity to see. The Siberian Kino production company, for instance, announce ten full-length films, twelve documents and ten culture films for 1929, and the Gosvoyenkino, which specialises in preparing films primarily for the Red Army, announced in various papers recently that they had the following films in production: *The War Secret*, *Discipline*, *Commander of the Red Army*, *The Melody in the Civil War*, *The Woman in the Civil War*, and *Party Followers and the Volga*. They are also making the cultural films, *Flight of Time*, *Instruction of the Infantry*, *Target Practice of a Division*, *Radio in the War and Cavalry*, while E. Jakushkin is making *The Imperial War* from topicals, for the fifteenth anniversary of the World War. This should be very interesting.

I remember the last time I was in the Handelsvertretung in Berlin I waited in a room piled to the ceiling with films. I dared not ask too greedily to have them projected. And among so many important ones, which should one choose? Every time a list of new pictures is printed the situation is repeated. There is no chance of keeping up with so swift a film development.

## CHAPTER X.

### EDUCATIONAL FILMS.

When I was fifteen I was sent suddenly to an English boarding school. Probably if I had not gone there I should never have written this book. Because I had naturally a placid disposition and a mania for historical research, and left alone I should have drifted into a library to write elaborate articles on why Middle Minoan II ought to be classified as Middle Minoan I b. But having spent two years in the rigid atmosphere of an English scholastic establishment, I discovered through sharp practical experience that it was useless believing established rules and theories because they were almost always wrong.

The thing I came up against first was waste. Waste of money and material. Pupils were sent at eight and left at eighteen utterly unprepared for business, marriage or leisure. I used to plan through many inactive hours just how I could have increased a hundred-fold the efficiency of the school. But I should have had to scrap first the entire curriculum, most of the teachers and all the favourite phrases doled out at each morning lecture, and of which the most repeated ran :—

• “ You are sent to school to learn to live.”

• “ Games promote good will and a community spirit.”

*To Learn to Live.* Who could find fault with the phrase? But actually the supervision was so strict that for months on end the pupils were never left alone, so that if by some extraordinary circumstance, say half-term, an hour of leisure arose, they did not know what to do with it. They had no knowledge as to how they were born, except wild stories culled from illicit sources. Marriage

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was a matter for giggles, or if thought of seriously, as an escape from parental discipline. Although some knew they would have to earn their living they had no idea of what they wanted to do, what positions were open to them, nor was any attempt made to discover their vocational aptitudes. It was pointed out to them merely that in later life they must go to church regularly, obey their parents and never go out alone with a boy.

Of the relationship of a citizen to the state they were taught nothing. They worked eight hours a day—at totally unrelated scraps of knowledge. For example: they specialised on the Wars of the Roses, but there was no modern history taught. The canal system of England was studied in detail, but they could not have written down the five chief cities in America. They knew obscure points of Elizabethan grammar, but they did not know who Aeschylus was nor the name of a single modern author. They worked two hours daily at a foreign language, but it was taught in so meaningless a manner that the class resembled a band of Eskimos wondering if that queer noise in the wind was a wireless signal, an approaching snowstorm or the growl of a hungry bear. None were capable of writing an elementary business letter.

As for games promoting a community spirit, they resulted actually in selfishness and favoritism. It was the history of imperialism on a small scale over again. Forty years ago it was a great step forward to substitute games in the open air for embroidering indoors. Now they have become a question of politics—could this pupil or that obtain the desired position; with those few favored by authority resisting any attempt to upset the system which would cause them to lose places painfully acquired. It is also a rather infantile confusion of idea that because a number of people join together in a game that a community feeling is established. Actually it may often mean mob-tyranny and mob-repression. True feeling for a community comes from absolute freedom—it is achieved in the group of children who spontaneously associate together in some of the new experimental schools for study. It does not come from forcing a couple of dozen people on to a field because they are afraid otherwise that they will lose praise, or esteem, or popularity.



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But what has all this got to do with Russian educational films?

It has this, that I learnt from practical experience that things change (though teachers often do not!), and that the reforms of yesterday may become the fetters of to-day. Also, though I know this will shock many people, that I believe education will make its greatest stride forward when the personal element is negated in favour of the use of the machine.

I have taught myself and I have received many lessons. The finest type of teacher is possibly better than a machine, but I have only encountered two or three in a rather wide experience and these had no certificates, so would not have been eligible for schools. But a child's mind is very sensitive, and an uninterested or a stupid instructor may blight a subject forever in a single morning. Or the teaching may be given, owing to some national or psychological prejudice, in a distorted manner. Awkward events may be entirely omitted. Then the level of instruction may vary enormously in different schools. Do many English people ever consider, for instance, that in a great number of elementary schools most classes contain forty, and some contain more than fifty children, and that sometimes two classes go on at once in the same schoolroom? Consider how difficult it is to keep three or four children quiet and think how far it is possible for one person to take the psychological differences of forty into account. The only thing possible is army discipline, and army discipline is *not* education. The only chance of higher education for thousands of children depends upon success in a difficult examination taken at the age of eleven.

So I believe that if the best minds in every country could be collected together and a series of "fool-proof" text books prepared, rather on the lines of the Dalton assignments, together with films (silent ones and talkies), and supplemented by wireless lectures, it would be possible to make the most modern developments accessible not to a few but to all children, and lest it should be said that such a scheme would increase unemployment, it can be pointed out that teachers would still be necessary, to supervise, run the projector, hear the mechanical drill some subjects exact, and to explain how a reference library should be used. But the

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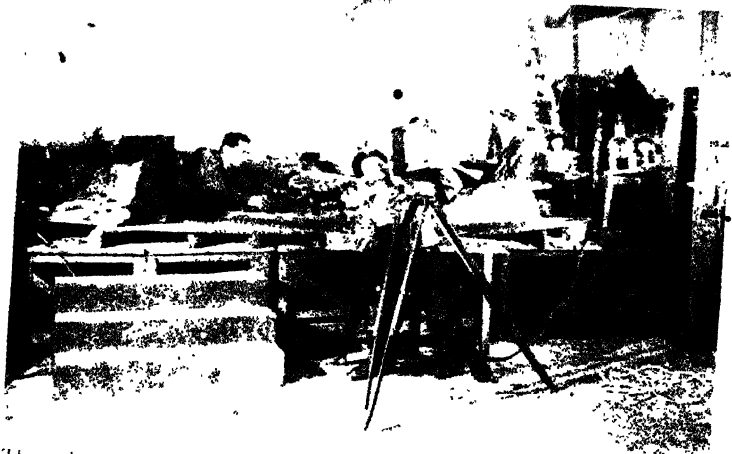
actual teaching would be transferred from them to the screen and to text books appealing directly to the children.

Again, what has this got to do with Russian educational films?

Russia has made more experiments with the educational use of the cinema than any other nation. It was said that in 1914 only twenty-three out of every hundred people in Siberia could read and write, and that after the Revolution eighteen million of the populace were illiterate. But the Russians realise that progress depends on education, and have therefore made great use of the travelling cinema and of the educational film. According to the Voks hand-book, travelling cinemas increased from 976 in 1925 to 1,824 in 1928. Each of these travelling cinemas covers an itinerary monthly of about twenty villages. Once the route is finished they stock up with fresh films and begin over again. The price fixed for peasants is from five to ten kopecks a performance, and in very poor villages they are admitted free. The films are delivered to the travelling cinemas at a reduced price rated according to the district.

But, it may be argued, the cinema is used extensively in America and France in schools. An experiment has just been made, for instance, in the States, in which two groups, each of several thousand children, selected by means of school records, intelligence tests and other data, so that each group contained children at the same stage of development, were taught, one with the aid of the cinema and one without, over a period of months. The group that were shown films during the lessons rated 15 per cent. higher in history and 33 per cent. higher in geography than the group taught by ordinary methods. But, in spite of the better materials available in America, their films are many of them not so advanced educationally as those prepared in Russia.

American films are tied to a tradition. That is, nothing must be shown there that is linked to the vital facts of existence, or if these are mentioned they must be rigidly in accordance with an obsolete hypocritical tradition. Or again, the newest developments in medicine and often science are not shown, because the trend there is against the popularization of science. In fact, it has been said that the doctor in America has taken the place of the priest. And



The making of a Soviet animated-cartoon film, called *Morn to Evening*. Movies are considered in Russia as the best medium for education, and this film depicts the work of a day.



From the educational film, *Love in Nature*, produced by Dr. Jalkin for Soyking. Influence of the hormones or internal secretions of certain glands on the height of a



From *The Copy of I-hor-ehim* in edition directed by V. K. Kozlov and T. I. Izhikova.

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older people often resent having modern investigations made known to them. But in Russia everything is begun, if possible, from a fundamental basis—birth, death, actual events of life—and, as far as possible, all medical and scientific knowledge is presented in the films so that everyone who wishes may keep in touch with new discoveries.

And that is what education should be. The capacity to profit by what is ever being discovered. The ability also to discriminate. Every intelligent citizen ought to be able in minor matters to be his own doctor, lawyer and adviser, and to know at about what point he should pass to a specialist in the subject. But there, again, little can be done until the top heavy weight of knowledge no longer required has been removed from various curriculums. I remember a young doctor, for instance, who told me that all the knowledge really of use in modern medicine was crammed into six months of the medical course. The remaining years were spent learning subjects in detail that had little or no link with medicine as it is to-day, while many important discoveries had to be omitted from the programme on account of lack of time. But to a large extent the people who set the courses do not believe in modern developments themselves, and without a certificate no one can practise. It is the same with law and the same with most trades, even including that of packing boxes of chocolates, for in the experiments recorded by Professor Pear, it was found that by means of special training a novice could learn to pack them better and more quickly in four days than someone who had been at the work, according to the old methods, for six months.

It is to be hoped that Russia, who was able to scrap all old methods and begin from the beginning, will bear these facts in mind.

Russian educational films are divided into several classes. There are the geographic and ethnographic films, chief of which are :—

*The Country of Tchuvasia.*  
*Pamir.*  
*White Russia.*

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*To the Shores of the Arctic Ocean.*  
*The Krassin Rescue Expedition.*

There are the serious scientific films, of which the most important are :—

*Mechanics of the Brain.*  
*Fatigue and the Struggle Against It.*  
*Radio.*  
*The Riddle of Life.*  
*Problems of Nutrition.*

There are films dealing with sociological problems :—

*The Expiation.*  
*The Abortion.*  
*The Truth of Life.*  
*The Prostitute.*

And there are films dealing with the problems of labor or the management of large works, such as :—

*Naphtha.*  
*The Choice of a Profession.*  
*The Volkhof Plant.*  
*The Dnepro Plant.*

Besides these and many other films of the same nature, the historical films based on the story of Russian development for the past hundred years have all educational value.

I have dealt elsewhere with *Mechanics of the Brain*. I saw in Berlin, by courtesy of the Russian Handelsvertretung, *Fatigue and the Struggle Against It*. This showed in detail some of the well-known experiments in this direction, particularly the record of typing, showing the gradual slackening of speed and increased incidence of mistakes as the day went on. There were also some interesting photographs of a man taking bricks to the top of a high building. Beginning with a full load early in the morning, the bricks gradually decreased in number till the noon rest hour, mounted immediately afterwards only to decrease, at first suddenly, and afterwards in a gradual curve till work ended. These records should be much more used than they are, by and for workers ;

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because they prove indisputably that more work can be accomplished in several short stretches than in one long continuous period. It is time that the Victorian idea (also due, surely, to some infantile confusion of length with result) was done away with from education and business. I have noted carefully from personal experience in trying to learn various languages that I do not react to unfamiliar sounds after thirty minutes. But it is impossible to persuade teachers, as a rule, of that fact. They are persuaded there is more virtue in an hour. So with work; there should be more opportunity for change than there is commonly, and, when possible, work should be considered rather by results than fixed hours.

I have not seen the film of the Krassin rescue expedition, released recently in Berlin by Prometheus under the title of *Das Weisse Geheimnis*, but I have seen many photographs and heard from reliable sources that it is one of the finest Arctic films yet made. And the Arctic has its photographic dangers: I remember seeing a short film recently which was full of shots resembling the badly printed blocks in a geography primer. But it is easy to see from the Krassin stills that they have really got the danger and adventure and beauty of iceberg and snow waste into the picture.

It may be convenient to mention here, although it is not strictly an educational film, *The Document of Shanghai*, directed by Y. M. Bliokh. Certain sections of this film, particularly those showing the crowds, were extremely interesting. But this was (and it is the only Russian film I have seen that was) definitely propagandistic in the wrong sense of the term. For while I imagine all decent English people agree that the scale of life and rate of payment of the Chinese laborers is shocking, there was no attempt made in the film to show any constructive principles by which it could be improved. We were merely shown shots of people bathing and dancing, followed by a sub-title that this was Western civilization. This is just as absurd as the *Times* critic who found *Storm Over Asia* ridiculous.

Western civilization has given the world a great many desirable things—ag. & cultural machinery, machinery of all kinds designed to abolish or lighten labor as bad as that depicted in the film with

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the Chinese workers; it has given, moreover, the modern conception of education and human rights. The East tends, on the whole, to accept autocracy willingly. And probably the earliest traders from Europe to China paved the way for the present development of the desire of the East also, for universal betterment. Again, it is partly the duty of the West to give to the East, for, if the West develops and the East remains in a state of stagnation and bondage, the result of over balance would not be pleasant.

There were, however, some scenes shown of the shooting of some rebels by soldiers, that were so degrading and brutal that one does not wonder that the cameraman afterwards forgot all measure.

But one does feel that something constructive was lacking from what was in places an extremely interesting "document."

Dziga Vertof was born in 1896. He completed his studies at the secondary school, but war service prevented him from finishing his University course.

Vertof works only with the news of the day; with real material, and was the first to inaugurate this kind of work. He has directed *Kino of the Week*, about forty numbers, and *The Conflict Under Tsaritsin*. For the October anniversary, Vertof and Savilief produced the chronicle, *Anniversary of the October Revolution*. This was followed by the *Party Trip of the All-Russian Executive Committee* (in connection with the agitation on behalf of trains and steamers) and the *History of the Civil War*.

During the Civil War he worked with the cameraman, Yermolof, in Kozhevnikof's army as director of war pictures. Then he organised the Kino-department with Lemberg, at the All-Russian Central Executive Committee. For about two years he worked on the organisation and equipment of Kino-transport, Kino-trucks, and steamer-Kinos. In 1922 he conducted a cinema campaign for the fight against the famine. Then he worked as manager of the Kino-chronicle, V.F.K.O., and produced *Kino-Truth*. At the end of 1919 he organised the group Kinokof. During the whole course of his work twenty-three numbers of *Kino-Truth* were issued, with a few scientific chronicles and the first series of *The Kino-Eye*.



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His work includes : *A Glance of the Kino-Eye over U.S.S.R. Export and Import of the State Trading Department, The Moscow Soviet, A Sixth Part of the World, Eleven (or The Eleventh Year)*, and his latest work, *The Man with the Movie Camera*.

One becomes resentful, reading these names, that the films are not available in England. Surely the actual pictures of the Revolution and the film made for the October anniversary must be among the most interesting chronicles of the world. For what actually happens is always more fascinating than what might happen ; I am always sad, personally, when the news reel is over, and it would help one to form a more accurate estimate of Russia if these actual shots of its history could be projected in England.

## CHAPTER XI.

### FILM PROBLEMS OF SOVIET RUSSIA.

There are hundreds of films in Russia, and most of them are of the same high standard as those I have described. Russians have said that some of the best films they make are never exported abroad. But the industry is faced with many problems, chief of which are the following: How long can Russia go on producing films unless foreign markets are open to her; if the standards of production be lowered to meet the wishes of foreign buyers will the films not lose their character, and be unable to compete with other pictures; is there a strong enough body of artistic criticism to insist that Russian films be shown abroad in an intact form; is it possible for Russia to turn out works of genius yearly or will the level drop of itself, through the using up of creative forces?

To recapitulate: films cost money. They need not cost the vast amounts expended on them in Hollywood, where (as people who have worked there have graphically described to me), in a case of doubt, the more expensive way, rather than the best, is chosen. Still, a full-length picture cannot be made for nothing. Pan-chromatic stock costs four pounds for four hundred feet, and anywhere from ten thousand feet upwards is required to make a picture, say, of five thousand. This can be doubled if, as is usual, a second negative is required. Then there is the developing and printing. A positive is worth about fifty pounds for the sheer cost of making the print. It cannot be used indefinitely, as it is bound to get slightly scratched and worn each time it is put through the projector.

At first Russia was totally dependent for her supplies of cameras, lamps and raw stock on imports, but she is now endeavouring to



From *The Windless Spontaneous* a Nohkino film directed by T. Paoletti



From *Il Homicidio* is *Benito*, a man. Meschery's mother, directed by L. Polidoro. N. 198, source is the mother



From *Il Homicidio* is *Benito*, a man. Meschery's mother, directed by L. Polidoro. N. 198, source is the mother

## • FILM PROBLEMS OF SOVIET RUSSIA •

manufacture film in the country itself. But the cost of the initial factories must have been heavy.

It is true that the number of cinemas in Russia increases annually. The numbers are given variously in different books, but they amount to many thousands. An exact figure is probably not obtainable, for there are the visiting cinemas, already described, that go from village to village, the kinos in the towns and those used in the instruction of the Red Army. But the prices of admission are low and the cost of transit heavy. Also the Russian Government have consistently and constantly spent money on films for educational purposes. It is probable that in a few years time they can afford, like Japan, to disregard outside markets completely if they wish, as Russia becomes more developed, agriculturally and otherwise. But at the moment a sale of films abroad would undoubtedly be advantageous to them.

Germany (and to lesser extent), Austria and Switzerland have shown Russian films steadily for years. And I repeat without any resulting riot of the population. Russia and America have also agreed to a fixed exchange of pictures. A certain number of American films have been bought by Russia since 1921. Last year it was also stated that they had taken some British pictures.

We have not so far shown any new Russian films freely in return. Yet I believe that the English would most respond, of all nations, to Russian cinematography. For they portray what I still try to believe we possess, abstract justice and ability for effort, struggle and adventure.

On the other hand, if Russian films are to be shown freely abroad, will it not have a deteriorating effect upon their work? The Germans say it will. Several well-known German directors and critics said to me last year: "Our alliance with the English film world has set us back five years." And when I saw the new German productions I realised it had. It did not soothe my feelings, either, to read shortly afterwards in an English trade paper that since the Germans had adapted themselves to the English way of thinking, their films were becoming popular. How many people realise the fight that a handful of Germans are putting up in their country to try and save the artistic freedom of the German film?

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They are pricked and persecuted in every possible and trifling manner. They are not allowed to choose their own casts, nor often their own cameramen. Scenes, sometimes reels, are cut out of the finished films and scenarios deliberately altered. Yet there are several directors able to turn out films of the highest Russian standard if allowed. The beginning of *Freie Fahrt* (directed by E. Metzner) was as good as any Sovkino production.

Russian films, then, will most probably deteriorate if shown freely in England, although, as their general standard is so much higher, they will probably always be interesting.

Why must they drop at all?

There are four points to be considered in answer to that question : censorship, the popular press, timid renters and untrained audiences.

Consider the press first. In a newspaper office it is a question of write what you are told or lose your job. And there are generally plenty of good reasons why you don't want to lose your job. But every newspaper has a political policy and everything, including book and film reviews, is influenced thereby. I know of one case where strict orders were given to slam a particular book of poetry because the author was the "wrong" side of politics. It was nothing to do with Russia and the verses (they were bad) were about lambs and nymphs and spring, so it did not matter. But that is the attitude Russian films must meet.

If the policy of the paper is against the resumption of trade with Russia, what do you think would happen to someone who dared to write favorably of *His Son or Mother*? There are a few papers in England (mainly provincial ones) where they insist upon artistic matters being kept free from politics, but there are not many of them. It may be argued that the tradition of English criticism is always to be a score of years behind the times (Keats, Byron, Swinburne, Hardy, etc.), but on the other hand people, if they read books at all, fifty years ago were usually qualified to a certain extent to form an independent opinion. Reviews might influence, but there were safeguards. Now, however, with many readers but few scholars (thanks to our educational system) people are fond of repeating potted phrases out of papers. There are still too many



Preparing a shot in *The Hoboken Shorebirds*, directed by  
J. Prosselsky.



B. Barnett director for Meschbrapum-Film





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people in England who, because they see a thing in print, believe it must be true. And they have an appalling unwillingness to track a thing to its source.

Then, most of the film critics of the various daily, weekly or monthly journals have come to cinematography via dramatic criticism. And if ever there were a gulf between two arts it is between the theatre and the cinema. The cinema depends upon reality; the theatre upon exaggeration. (I remember seeing once what was merely a photographed play. The hero, abandoned by the heroine, decided in the best stage manner to commit suicide. This was too much for the Berlin audience. They laughed, they whistled, they shouted advice, "You'll forget her in a week," "Try a drink," and, finally, as the hero clasped his brow and wriggled, an old gentleman moaned mockingly, "Too bad, so young." It was one of the most enjoyable evenings I have spent, because it proved there were people who were not going to pay to see stupidities any longer.) The excellence of a play is defect in a film. Yet many critics either search for the same qualities that they were accustomed to look for in the drama or have a slightly condescending air towards that popular pastime, the movies. There is, for example, a marvellous phrase of Mr. Ashley Dukes, quoted in *The Cinema* for February 4th: "He did not believe that anyone disliked the film as an art-form more than he did, but it had to be recognised that it *was* an art-form."

What we need is not someone with an inferiority complex, but someone who will say that the public is being given trash when there is art that could be provided for it. Words are not much good to describe a film. For it is not a play, it is rhythm, and movement, and photography, and cinema-acting, which is utterly removed from theatre-acting, and it needs to be seen, not described. Yet many critics make no effort to see pictures that could give them a standard of criticism. There are some that do. These spend their holidays in Berlin and Paris seeing what has been done in cinematography abroad, but they have to do so at their own expense, and many newspapers are unwilling to give them much space for their criticisms because the films are unlikely to come to England.

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And then we have no trained audiences. In a small Swiss town at the foot of the mountains, the local cinemas showed in the course of three or four months such a varied programme of the world's best and worst films as *Mother*, *Son of the Mountains*, *The Circus*, *Belphegor*, *Prey of the Wind*, *Prince of Adventurers*, *Wolf's Clothing*, *The Little Chocolate Girl*, *Messalina*, *Chang*, *The Violinist of Florence*, *The Spy*, and a quite epic document in which the heroine plunged into the snow to save her old mother and her old home, descended on a sledge with a bundle of blankets and a chimney, crashed through a circus tent at the bottom of the snowy hill and therefore became a famous dancer, turned her mother out into the gutter accidentally, where the old dame fainted grabbing at an apple, and was finally reconciled to her fiancé in an old cab! Yes, this was sandwiched between *Mother* and Rene Clair's *Prey of the Wind*, and the same people went to them all.

But in England most of the films shown are of one monotonous level. The result is that an Englishman bases his judgment on a standard that was passed abroad, five years ago. This, of course, is to the advantage of the American producer, who fears Continental competition. Already the market in France and Germany has been curtailed, and for that reason the American "fan" and trade press carry on a constant campaign to discredit Continental films, and this is reflected over here.

The problem of the timid renter is part of the problem of the untrained audience. Once let enough people demand a film or condemn another and the manager of the cinema will adjust his programmes. The Avenue Pavilion has been very successful. It is really the question of what you, the spectator, are willing to do for the screen, for the cinema is an active, and not a passive, art.

The chief barrier in England, however, is the censorship which in turn has "tied up" with the customs duties. A copy of a film may have to pay in duty anywhere from fifty to two hundred pounds, according to length and whether negative or positive only is imported. Naturally, no merchant is going to import a foreign film unless he is sure of its enjoying a long run. This is equally a barrier to the artistic films of the young French and German producers as to the Russian. It has been suggested in *Close Up*

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that this difficulty could be met by instituting another letter, other than A or U, for a separate division of artistic or cultural films. These would be censored by a board composed of artists and scientists. Films so censored would be admitted to England for a limited number of performances at a less high rate of duty.

With regard to the censorship, I have only to refer readers to the censorship regulations themselves (an abstract of them was printed in *Close Up* for February, 1929). It will be noted that serious treatment of any problem is forbidden and a premium put upon vulgarity. So, next time you see a vulgar film don't blame Hollywood, blame the censor. One does wonder, however, how a recent popular success got by that incest barrier. Presumably it was because it was not treated in a serious manner.

The Russians have done so many apparently impossible things that even if foreign markets were closed to them they would no doubt continue to turn out excellent films. And while the standard of production may slacken in time, it is doubtful whether it has even yet reached its highest point of development.

For the moment the battle is to the spectator. Is he willing to allow a handful of individuals to deny him the intellectual liberty common to the Continent? If not, it is for him to fight the matter, by letter, by protest and by word of mouth. Don't "See England First," but make for the Ursulines, the Vingt Huit or Berlin next holiday. Judge for yourself what the censor considers unfitted for you. Then come back and decide whether this humiliating position accords with the traditions of England, which they proclaim they are keeping in surety.

## SUGGESTIONS

*France.*—Russian films are seldom shown except in a mutilated form, unless by private societies. Interesting and unusual films, however, are shown daily at the Studio des Ursulines, Studio 28, Vieux Colombier, Tribune Libre du Cinéma, Ciné Latin and Salle des Agriculteurs. Fare to Paris and costs there are too well known, or can be so easily found out, that they need not be listed here.

*Germany.*—Fares via the Hook of Holland, the quickest route, vary from about five pounds fifteen second to nearly eight pounds first-class. Much the easier way is to take a Hamburg-Amerika liner from Southampton to Hamburg, or a Norddeutscher Lloyd from (usually) Plymouth to Bremen. The voyage along the coast of England and past Heligoland is very interesting, and takes about thirty-six hours. Fare, five pounds first-class or about three fifteen second, including everything. Railway fares from Hamburg to Berlin vary from about 15s. to 30s., according to class travelled. The steamers are so large sea-sickness need not be feared. Hotel costs in Berlin are about the same as in London, but there are many inexpensive pensions. One warning : all the life and big kinos of Berlin centre *am Zoo*, near the Zoological Gardens, and about twenty minutes' ride from the *Unter den Linden*. Should difficulty be experienced in finding out where films are showing, mentioned as having a German release, enquire at Derussa, Friedrichstr. 8, or Prometheus (quite near), Hedemannstr. 21. They would no doubt inform the traveller if the film was showing in a small outlying kino. Should a film be

## SUGGESTIONS

privately projected, remember it is usual to tip the projectionist. It is said to be possible to get to Germany very cheaply on small cargo boats. Most Germans speak a little English and the officials are helpful to the traveller.

*Switzerland.*—Russian films released in Germany are often, but not always, shown in Switzerland. Three or four might be showing in successive weeks and then months might pass before any were available. The programmes in the large towns, however, are often very good. The Ciné Club de Genève gives interesting *seances* each season.

*Belgium.*—There are several excellent societies for the showing of unusual (including Russian) films, notably the Ciné Club d'Ostende. *Variétés* has also formed for members only a club named *Lever House* at Brussels.

*Holland.*—The Film Liga of Amsterdam shows unusual films, and some of its members are engaged in making interesting and experimental pictures.

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